Scottish Birds

published by the
SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

VOLUME 43(1) MARCH 2023

Scottish Birds

Established in 1958.

Published quarterly by:
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Printed by:
Swallowtail Print Limited,
Unit 2 Drayton Industrial Park,
Taverham Road, Drayton
Norwich, Norfolk NR8 6RL.

Front Cover:
Pink-footed Geese, Fraserburgh, North-East Scotland, December 2012.
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ISSN 0036-9144

Scottish Birds is the quarterly journal for SOC members, and is published in March, June, September and December annually.

Containing original papers relating to ornithology in Scotland, topical articles, bird observations, reports of rare and scarce bird sightings, alongside branch and Club-related news, our members tell us that *Scottish Birds* is one of the key benefits of belonging to the SOC. Its different sections have been developed to meet the wide needs of the birdwatching community, and the publication is renowned for its first-class photography.

An archive of the journal is available on the SOC website, where links can be found to other Club publications including the *Online Scottish Bird Report.*

More about the SOC...

On the one hand, a birdwatching club. Established in 1936, the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) is Scotland's bird club with 15 branches around the country and a growing membership of over 3,000. Through a programme of talks, outings, conferences and other events, it brings together like-minded individuals with a passion for birds, nature and conservation.

On the other, a network of volunteers across Scotland, gathering vital, impartial information about our wild birds. The data we collect is made available to conservationists, planners and developers, and is used by organisations such as the RSPB, as one of the first points of reference in informed conservation planning.

Club Headquarters can be found at Waterston House, Aberlady, overlooking the scenic local nature reserve. Housed within, is the George Waterston Library, the largest ornithological library in Scotland, and the Donald Watson Gallery - one of the jewels in the Waterston House crown, exhibiting wildlife art all year-round.

Join us...

As well as receiving *Scottish Birds* every quarter, SOC members have access to a programme of talks and outings across Scotland and affiliation to a local branch of the Club. New members choosing to pay their subscription by direct debit are eligible to a free thank you gift.

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For more information about the Club and its activities, including details of how to join, please visit www.the-soc.org.uk or contact Waterston House on 01875 871 330, or email membership@the-soc.org.uk

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Plate 1. Ruth Briggs, at home, January 2023. © *Richard Briggs*

Welcome to this latest issue of *Scottish Birds*. I hope you find it a timely accompaniment to the pleasure of longer days, springtime birding and plans for the season ahead. I always look forward to hearing the first Chiffchaff which, for me, signals the true arrival of spring. I know it will be followed by Blackcaps, Willow Warblers and more, and the woodland in my 'patch' will be full of songs, sounds and activity. Fresh leaves on the trees, early-flowering grasses and violets and unfurling bracken on the woodland floor, and deer, squirrels and sunshine complete my woodland scene. A Treecreeper does what its name suggests while Nuthatches, now fully established around here, are much more 'shouty'. A Buzzard will emerge to fly over the adjacent fields and grassland; there are Yellowhammers and Reed Buntings along the hedges and a Whitethroat in an isolated bush.

I'm no wordsmith, but trying to offer the above picture is, I'd like to think, a reminder of one of the SOC's key objectives – 'encouraging the appreciation of the creative arts in natural history'. Did you enjoy reading the essay 'Stay Alive' by Scotland's makar, Kathleen Jamie, in the last issue? I imagine it will have generated varied reactions amongst readers. The unique series of art exhibitions curated by Laura Gressani at Waterston House, Aberlady, is a long-established feature of the Club's facilitation of creative arts, always worth a visit if you can get there and an apt reflection of the legacy of the great bird artist Donald Watson after whom the gallery is named. Details of current and future shows are in this issue and on the SOC website. Tim Birkhead, in one of the Club's recent series of online talks, vividly described earliest known depictions of birds in Spanish cave paintings. And then there's music – perhaps just that from the birds themselves, but have you noticed the way radio stations are offering more frequent compilations of birdsong into and alongside instrumental pieces? The appreciation of birds in art forms extends to audiences far beyond the regular birder.

Back to the coming season, and a feature of the essay mentioned above. We'll soon be finding out more about the impact of the 2022 outbreaks of avian flu on populations of breeding seabirds and other groups. What numbers of Gannets, Bonxies and other species will we see back at their regular sites this year? Is the disease still rife within the colonies? Has it spread? Some winter reports were concerning. What level of breeding success will the birds have? Surveys and counts will be of paramount importance, and SOC members will contribute to them. Let's hope the birds can thrive this year and our visits and outings around Scotland are not so tinged with worry for them.

Good birding!

Ruth Briggs, SOC President

Roosting and feeding Pink-footed Geese in Fife, 1991/92 to 2020/21

A.W. BROWN & L.M. BROWN

The roosting and feeding sites of Pink-footed Geese in Fife were monitored over 30 years from winters 1991/92 to 2020/21. In addition to data gathered for national coordinated counts in October and November, four key roost sites were monitored on a regular basis and changes in their use were identified and a further 14 sites recorded roosting birds. Whilst Cameron Reservoir declined in use, there was a corresponding increase in roosting birds at the Eden Estuary and The Wilderness, Ladybank, with the latter becoming the principal roost site by the end of the study period. Overall, despite the increase in the national population, the percentage of birds occurring in Fife on national counts remained fairly stable at 3.1%. Feeding flocks were recorded throughout the study area with a concentration in east Fife but distribution changed as the Cameron Reservoir roost declined and the Eden Estuary and The Wilderness increased in importance with birds feeding closer to these two roosts. The changes in the pattern of roosting and feeding identified highlighted the importance of on-going monitoring, the need to review site protection designations on a regular basis and the potential to include feeding areas within the designation and management processes.

Introduction

In Fife two sites have statutory designations (SSSI, SPA and Ramsar) relating to Pink-footed Geese *Anser brachyrhynchus* as one of their key features: Cameron Reservoir and the Firth of Tay and Eden Estuary (including Tentsmuir and Abertay Sands). This paper on the status, numbers and distribution of Pink-footed Geese in Fife presents the results of frequent monitoring of goose roosts at these and other sites together with feeding distribution during the winters 1991/92 to 2020/21 and indicates the changes that have occurred during that period. Data have also been extracted where relevant from casual observations in annual Fife Bird Reports (1988–2017), the results of the annual International Goose Census coordinated by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) (1961–2020), unpublished local goose reports (Brown 1994/95 to 2001/02, Central Scotland Goose Group Newsletters 1988 to 1997), bird atlas data (Elkins *et al.* 2003, 2016) and summary data presented in the Waterbird Review Series (Mitchell & Hearn 2004). Such monitoring is critical to understanding how sites are used throughout a winter and how this varies annually and can inform both the site management and designation process.

Data on the presence of Pink-footed Geese in Britain up to the early 20th century are scarce owing to the apparent confusion with the Bean Goose *Anser fabilis* (Mitchell & Hearn, 2004). Rintoul and Baxter (1935) made no reference to the species in Fife within the Forth Faunal area (which included south and west Fife) and Berry (1939) stated that the species was first recorded in the Tay Faunal area (which included north and east Fife) about 1870, wintered in very large flocks at the mouth of the Tay by 1900. Baxter & Rintoul (1953) were able to state that by the 1950s "*big flocks every winter, and in some years in incredible numbers, on the sand-banks of the Tay and in the fields about the East Neuk of Fife*" and Atkinson-Willes (1963) referred to large numbers roosting in the inner Firth, including at Mugdrum Island near Newburgh. By the early 1980s it was regarded as a common winter visitor which apparently reached maximum numbers in the 1960s (Smout 1986). From November 1960 a national census of Pink-footed Geese has taken place

which has enabled coordinated population estimates to be gathered for Fife every year since then (Mitchell & Hearn 2004, WWT 1961–2020). Most goose roost counts for Fife, other than for the Eden Estuary and to a lesser extent Tentsmuir, refer to these national counts although the status of the roost at Cameron Reservoir has been examined in more detail (Brown 2006, 2009 and 2017).

Data on the distribution and number of feeding birds in Fife were also limited. Newton *et al.* (1973) documented roosting and feeding areas in south-east Scotland, including Fife, for the period 1966–1970 and Newton & Campbell (1973) in a study of geese centred on Loch Leven, Kinross, in winters 1968/69 and 1969/70, included some feeding areas within Fife. Mitchell (2012) mapped feeding distribution relating to Cameron Reservoir and the Firth of Tay and Eden Estuary SPAs with regard to sensitivity to windfarm developments. Most recent data on both feeding and roosting birds, including counts submitted to the Fife Bird Reports, were casual observations, although the Fife Bird Atlases (Elkins *et al.*, 2003, 2016) did give an indication of broad distribution within certain timeframes and occasional annual goose reports included some distribution maps (Brown 1995–2002) as did a report on the species for Cameron Reservoir (Brown, 2009).

This study has expanded on the national roost count data to gather data throughout the winter on how some specific roost sites were used, a more detailed gathering of data on feeding areas and their relationship to roosts and how this has changed during the study period.

Study area and methods

The study area of 1,305 km^2 encompassed the administrative area of Fife bounded to the north by the Firth of Tay, to the south by the Firth of Forth and to the east by the North Sea with the Eden Estuary a major feature on this boundary. Within the largely gently rolling countryside are extensive intensively farmed areas in which there is a clear division between the arable east and greater pasture in the west (Corbett 1998). Natural water bodies in Fife are limited. Loch Ore and Loch Gelly are the largest but over 400 standing bodies of water exist, of which 45 are over 2 hectares in size (Corbett 1998), many of them man-made reservoirs or the result of sand and gravel extraction; their proximity to agricultural areas has made some of them attractive to roosting geese.

In addition to the national goose counts, which were primarily undertaken on specific dates in October and November, data were gathered for a 'goose winter', namely September to May. The coordinated national counts were supplemented with data on additional roost counts from sites which were regularly monitored, such as Cameron Reservoir, the Eden Estuary LNR and Kilconquhar Loch, additional counts submitted to the WWT in the national count returns and occasional roost counts submitted to the Fife Bird Report. Roost counts were undertaken at either dawn or dusk using the standard methodology (Gilbert & Gibbons 1998).

Additionally, observations were undertaken of feeding and resting locations, recording six-figure OS grid reference, habitat and activity, initially involving cold searching in the vicinity of known roosts and elsewhere which were subsequently monitored on a regular basis each winter. Some national count participants and other observers also submitted similar data. Data from WeBS where specific to a site were also gathered. In some instances, feeding birds were followed from their feeding area to a roost or departure direction was linked to a specific roost site and observations at roost sites enabled the location of potential feeding areas to be identified based on the direction of arrival or departure of the birds.

Results

National counts of roosting birds

Prior to the study period the average November count for the period 1960 to 1990 for Pink-footed Geese in Fife was 5,699 which represented 6.2% of the national total but declined from 10.3% during the period 1960 to 1969 to 4.4% from 1980 to 1990. The November counts for the period

1991 to 2020 and the additional October national counts undertaken during the same period fluctuated considerably (Figure 1). During the study period the national counts increased from about 200,000 in 1991 to about 500,000 in 2020 but the numbers in Fife did not mirror this increase and peak counts remained low relative to the national population on coordinated count dates. The average numbers recorded in October and November for three 10-year periods and their percentage of the national count further highlights this trend (Table 1). The November counts were higher in almost all years (24 of the 30 winters) but with considerable variation ranging from 295 in 1998 (when the October count was 2,389) to 18,448 in 2001 (1,641 in October) to 16,574 in 2012 (10,579 in October) and 16,968 in 2020 (11,500 in October); during the study the average November count was 8,221 (4,503 in October). The annual percentage of the national count for the peak in October/November also fluctuated widely but did not show any substantial increase (Figure 2); the average percentage of the national total during this period was 3.1%. Note that in 2008 the peak count was when a national count was held in December.

Table 1. The average number of Pink-footed Geese in Fife recorded for three 10-year periods in October and November and their percentage of the National Grey Goose census 1991–2020.

	Average Number counted		Average as % of national total	
	October	November	October	November
1991–2000	3,531	5,242	1.6	2.3
2001–2010	3,233	9,003	1.1	3.1
2011–2020	6,763	9,938	1.6	2.3

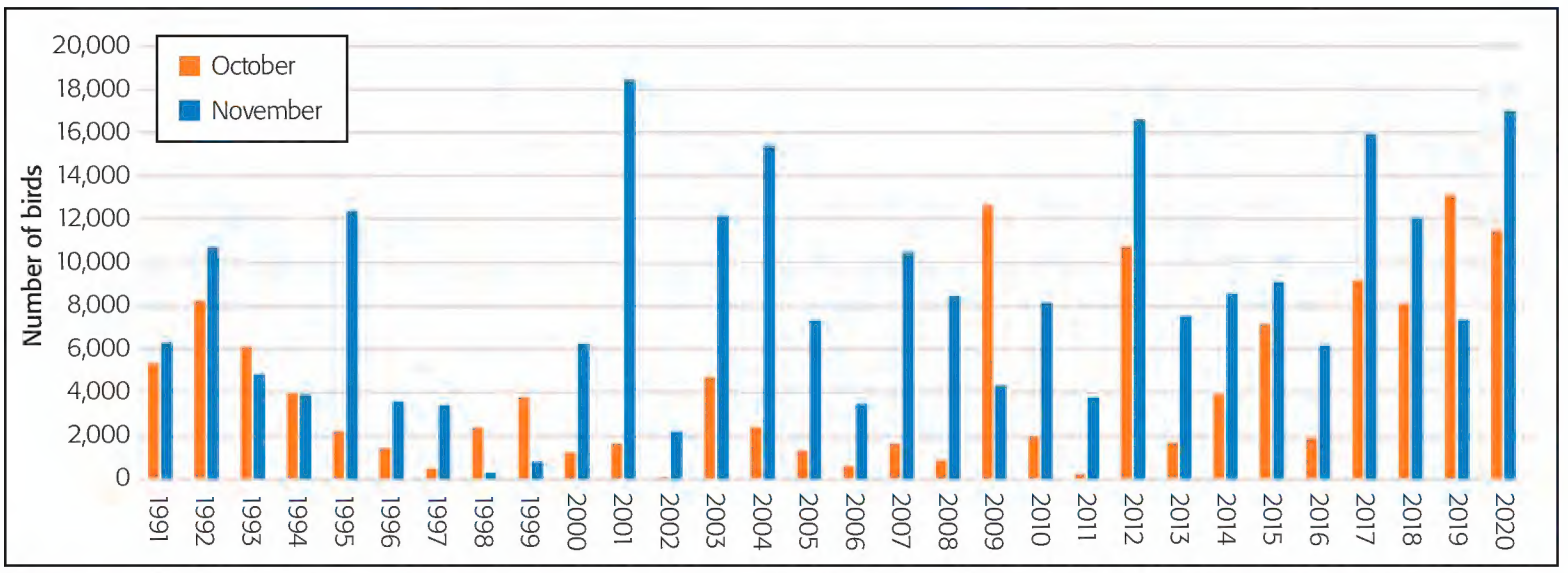


Figure 1. October and November National counts of roosting Pink-footed Geese in Fife 1991 to 2020. Note that data for 2006 and 2008 were incomplete and data for 2017 to 2020 have been adjusted from original national count data.

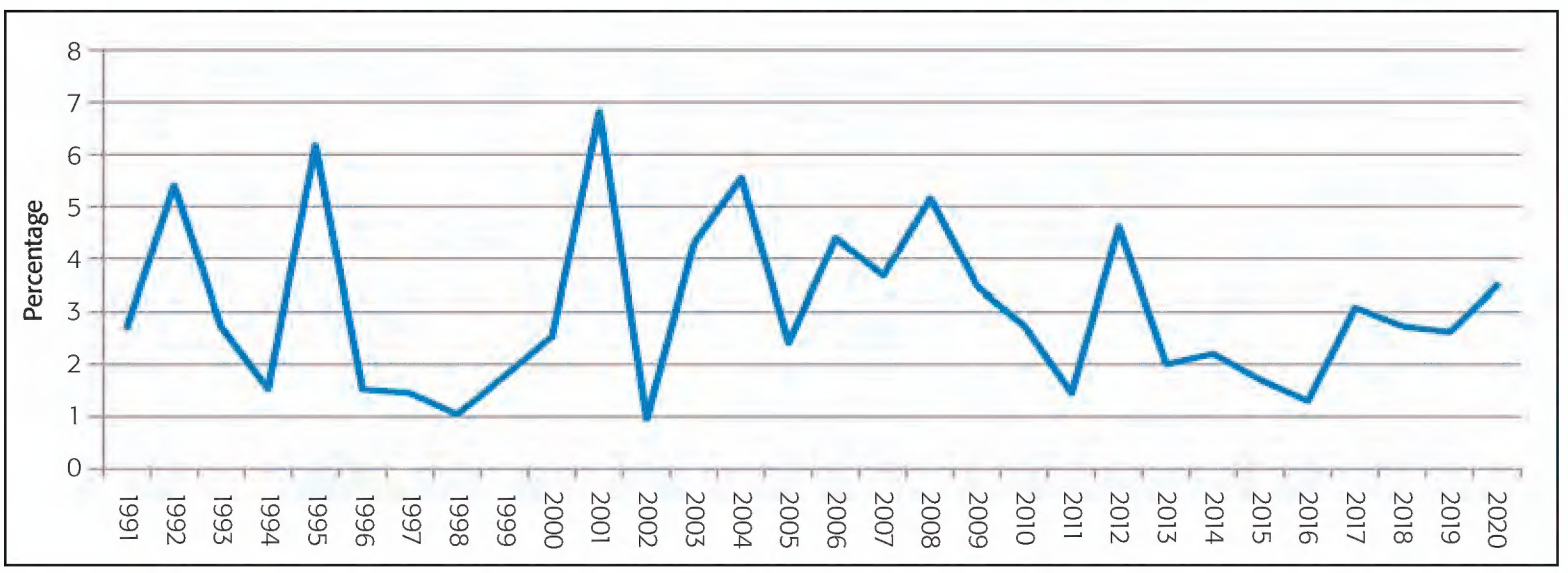


Figure 2. Peak number of Pink-footed Geese roosting in Fife in October or November as a percentage of the national totals 1991 to 2020. Note the peak was in December in 2008.

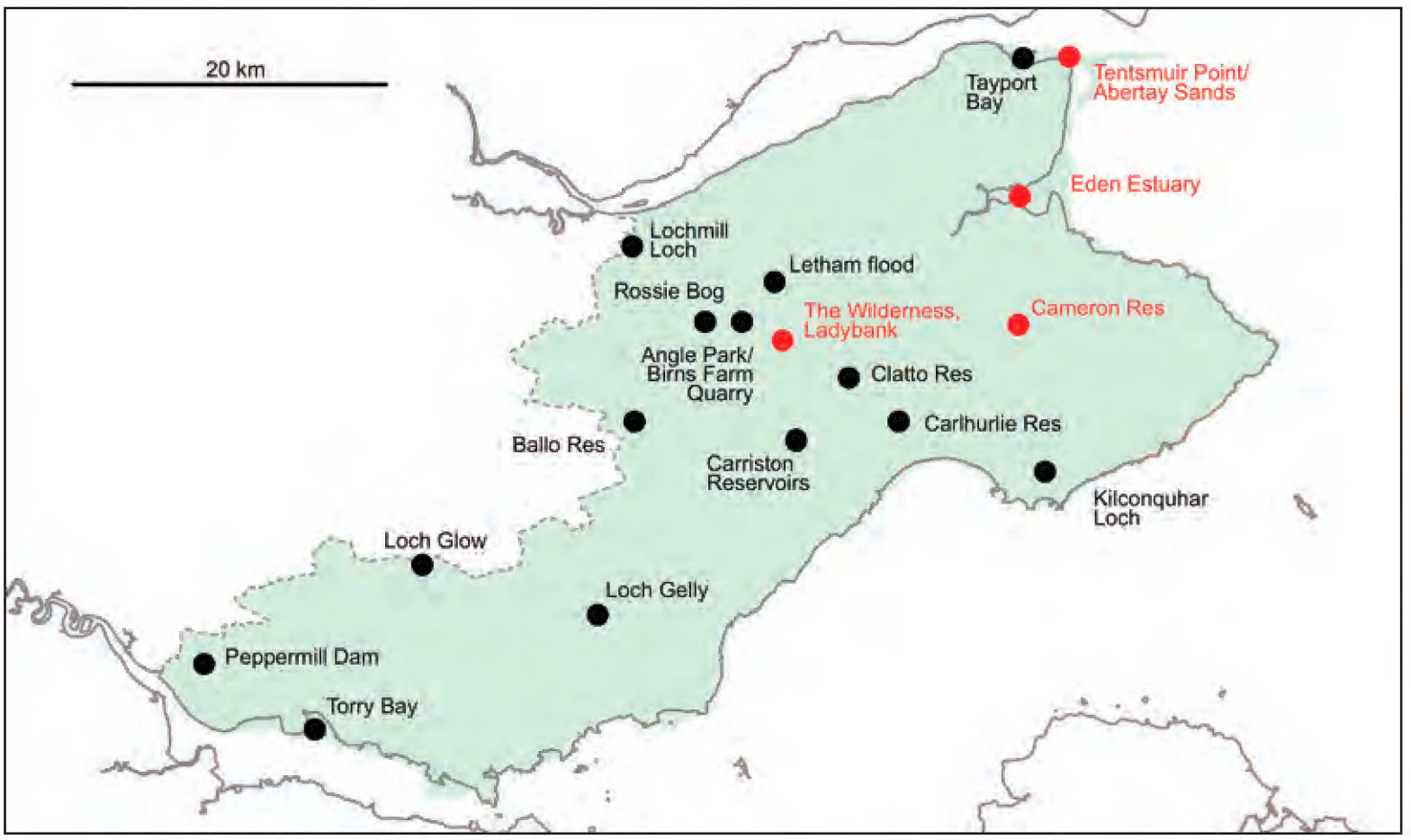


Figure 3. Location of sites in Fife where Pink-footed Geese roosted on at least one occasion from 1991 to 2020. Sites indicated in red were the key roost sites which recorded a series of roost counts most winters that provided valuable data on both their use in specific winters and how the peak varied with the national counts.

Roost sites

Throughout the study period an attempt was made every year to count all known and potential roost sites for the national counts. This was not always possible, usually owing to a lack of observers or adverse weather conditions, consequently the number of sites counted varied between years. In addition, counts at some sites were discontinued in the absence of any birds and new sites were added once they were identified as attracting roosting geese, some of which may have been overlooked in earlier years. Of 36 sites checked for both Pink-footed Geese and Greylag Geese 18 recorded roosting Pink-footed Geese on at least one occasion some of which were key locations (Figure 3).

1) *Cameron Reservoir.* Almost weekly counts were undertaken in October and November with additional counts throughout the winter (up to 20 counts in some winters - range 9 to 21) until the early 2000s, with fewer counts after winter 2016/17 when the roost was rarely used. Peak winter counts usually exceeded national counts with numbers increasing to a peak of over 25,000 by winter 1993/94 then declining followed by a partial recovery in the early 2000s before the site was only occasionally used and then abandoned as a roost by winter 2009/10 with a brief return of birds in winters 2014/15 to 2016/17 (Figure 4). The peak count was 27,300 on 30 October 1993.
2) *Eden Estuary.* The presence of a ranger responsible for the site, including monitoring licensed wildfowling activity, meant that the Eden Estuary Local Nature Reserve was regularly counted every winter except for a gap in 2006/07 when the ranger post was vacant. 15 to 20 counts were undertaken most winters (range 5 to 30) which gave a very good assessment of how geese used the site as a roost. Most counts were undertaken in October to December but from winter 2009/10 more January to April counts were made. The peak count was invariably higher than the national count and often considerably so (Figure 5) and until 2004/05 usually occurred in October/November. However, since 2005/06 peak counts have often been recorded in late winter/spring, possibly reflecting an increase in the number of counts then compared with earlier years. Up to 2005/06 the peak ranged from 354 to 3,320 but since 2007/08 the range

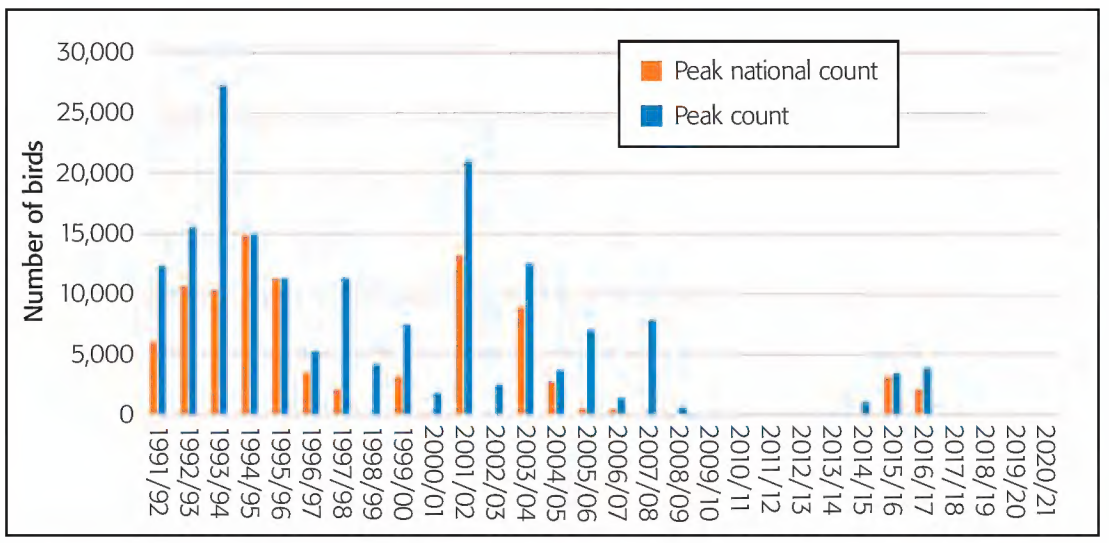


Figure 4. The peak national count and peak winter count of Pink-footed Geese at Cameron Reservoir, Fife, 1991/92 to 2020/21.

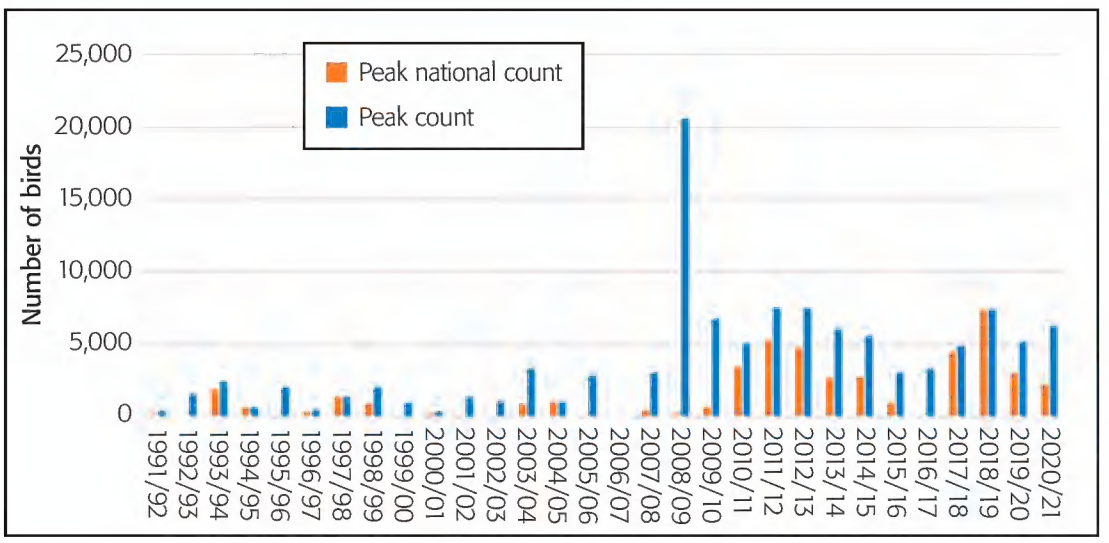


Figure 5. The peak national count and peak winter count of Pink-footed Geese at the Eden Estuary, Fife, 1991/92 to 2020/21. No counts in winter 2006/07.

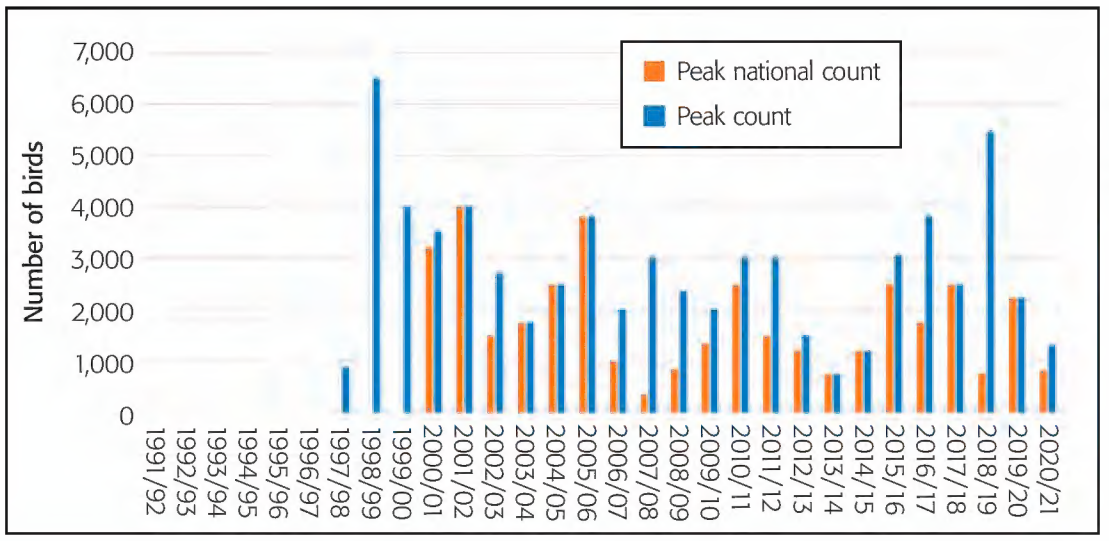


Figure 6. The peak national count and peak winter count of Pink-footed Geese at Tentsmuir Point/Abertay Sands, Fife, 1991/92 to 2020/21. Note that there were no counts prior to 1997/98.

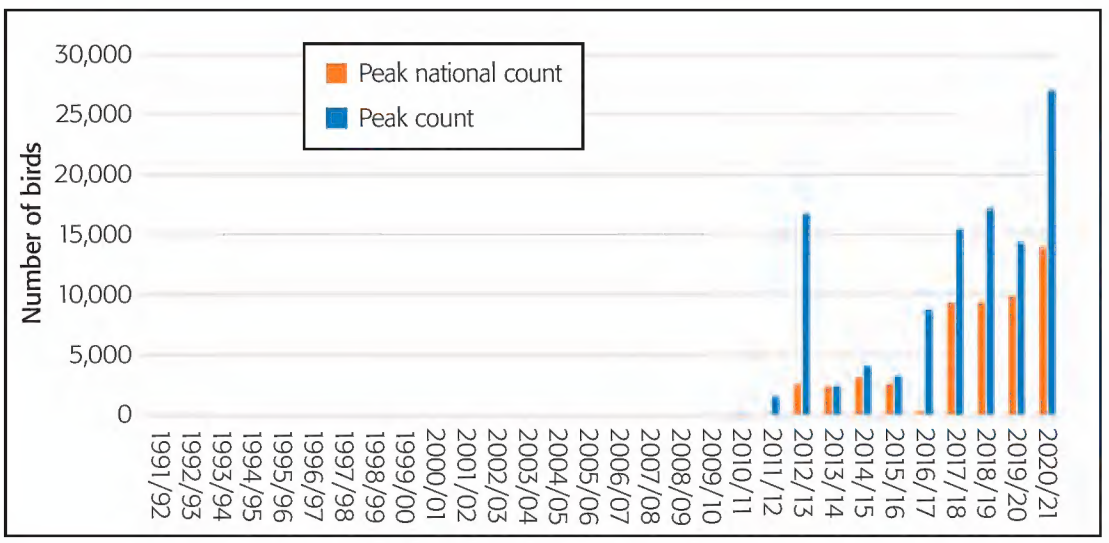


Figure 7. The peak national count and peak winter count of Pink-footed Geese at The Wilderness, Ladybank, Fife, 1991/92 to 2020/21. Note that there were no counts prior to 2009/10 when the site was an operational quarry.

has been 3,000 to 20,520, although the latter count on 9 February 2009 was an exceptional count the next peak being 7,500 on 4 February 2012. The increasing trend in use of the site from 2008/09 is clear and despite annual fluctuations has remained fairly consistent.

3) *Tentsmuir Point/Abertay Sands.* Counts for this site, as part of the Tentsmuir National Nature Reserve with a dedicated ranger, were available from winter 1997/98 and ranged from two to 29 counts per winter but generally eight to 12 counts were undertaken. Peaks most years were often higher than the national count other than in those winters when there were fewer additional counts (Figure 6). Few counts were reported for the January to April period but the data that were available suggested that few geese used the roost after January. Numbers fluctuated between winters but overall there has been a decline in peak counts. Other than the high peak of 6,500 on 26 October 1998 peak counts ranged from 750 to 5,450.
4) *The Wilderness, Ladybank.* This site was an operational sand and gravel quarry until 2014 which retained open water on completion of site works. Geese began to use the site as a roost from at least the 2010/11 winter since when regular counts were held to assess its value. Between seven and 14 counts were undertaken throughout each winter, including some in spring, which identified the increasing importance of this site and indeed it became the most important regular Pink-footed Goose roost site in Fife with peak counts generally greatly exceeding those obtained on national counts (Figure 7). A count of 26,984 on 14 November 2020 was the second largest roost count recorded for Fife after Cameron Reservoir in 1993. The timing of the peak varied between October and November but in the three winters 2014–15 to 2016–17 the peak occurred in March highlighting the importance of this roost throughout the winter.

The trend in numbers roosting over three ten-year periods at the four principal roosts sites clearly shows how the average numbers have changed with The Wilderness now the most important roost site with numbers comparable to that recorded for Cameron Reservoir in the 1991/92 to 2000/01 period (Figure 8).

Other sites

1) *Angle Park/Birns Farm Quarry.* This site was formed as the result of sand and gravel operations and was first counted as a potential goose roost in winter 2004/05. However, despite feeding birds being seen regularly in the surrounding area, 37 mostly national counts recorded roosting geese on only four occasions with a peak of 1,996 on 5 December 2008.
2) *Ballo Reservoir.* Only occasionally used as a roost but was probably under-recorded. Peak of 1,500 on 6 November 2010.
3) *Carlhurlie Reservoir.* Although birds were recorded feeding in the vicinity of the site there were no reports of roosting birds during autumn/winter but there was an infrequent roost with a peak of 164 on 16 March 1995 but with no roost recorded since 2007/08.
4) *Carriston Reservoirs.* Despite the presence of feeding flocks in the surrounding farmland it was rarely used as a roost and the peak was 900 on 8 April 1995.
5) *Clatto Reservoir.* Large numbers of feeding birds were recorded in the vicinity of this site on many occasions but most departed to roost elsewhere and relatively few positive roost counts were reported, generally of only a small number of birds until winter 2012/13 with a peak of 4,000 on 10 November 2013. Probably under-recorded, as counts were generally restricted to national count dates with only eight positive counts during the study period.
6) *Kilconquhar Loch.* This was a well-monitored site during the 1990s and early 2000s (the late Mike Ramage pers. comm.) when small numbers were recorded most years with a peak of 2,100 on 15 November 2003. The site was then a regular roost, based on national counts only, until winter 2010/11 since when no birds have been recorded roosting (Figure 9). The peak count was 14,000 on 6 December 2008.
7) *Letham flood.* A seasonally flooded field permanently flooded since winter 2013/14 but, despite the presence of several hundred feeding birds on many occasions, few if any birds roosted at the site.

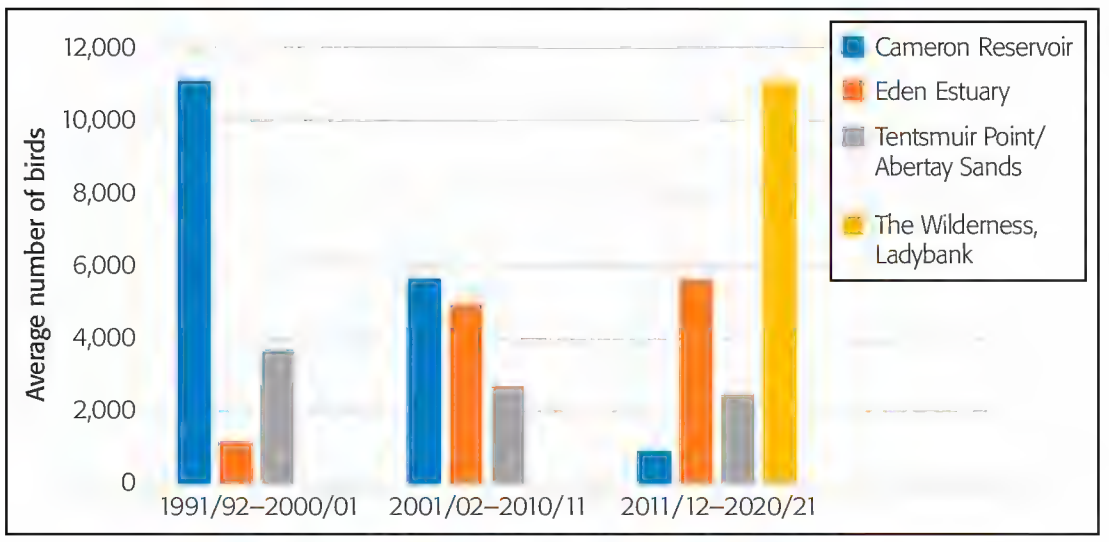


Figure 8. Changes over three ten-year periods in the average peak number of Pink-footed Geese roosting at the four principal roost sites in Fife, 1991/92 to 2020/21 (Note that The Wilderness did not exist as a roost site in the first two periods and Tentsmuir Point was counted only from 1997/98).

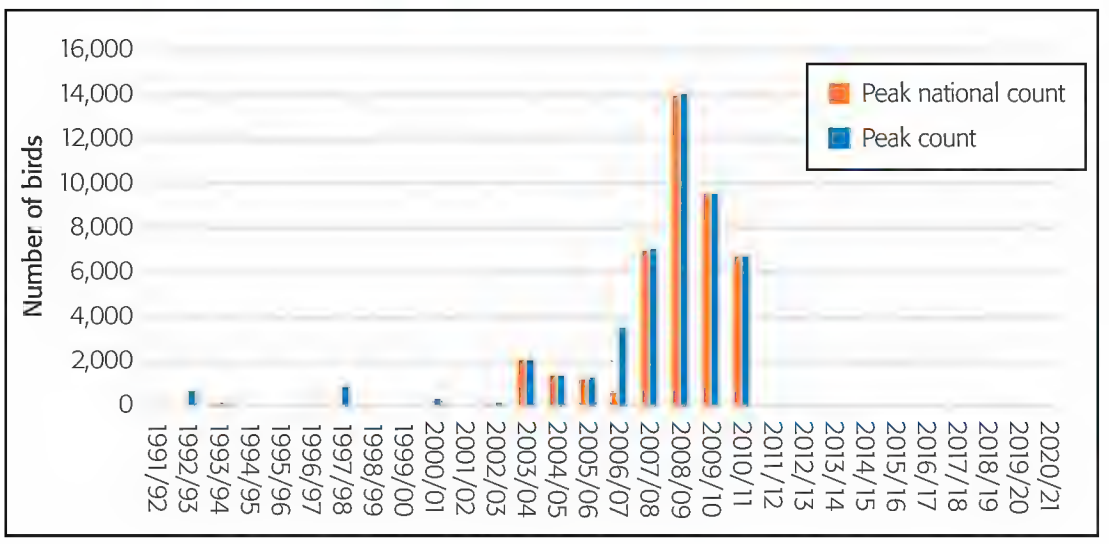


Figure 9. The peak national count and peak winter count of Pink-footed Geese at Kilconquhar Loch, Fife, 1991/92 to 2020/21. Note that there were no counts in winters 2016/17 and 2017/18 and few additional counts after winter 2003/04.

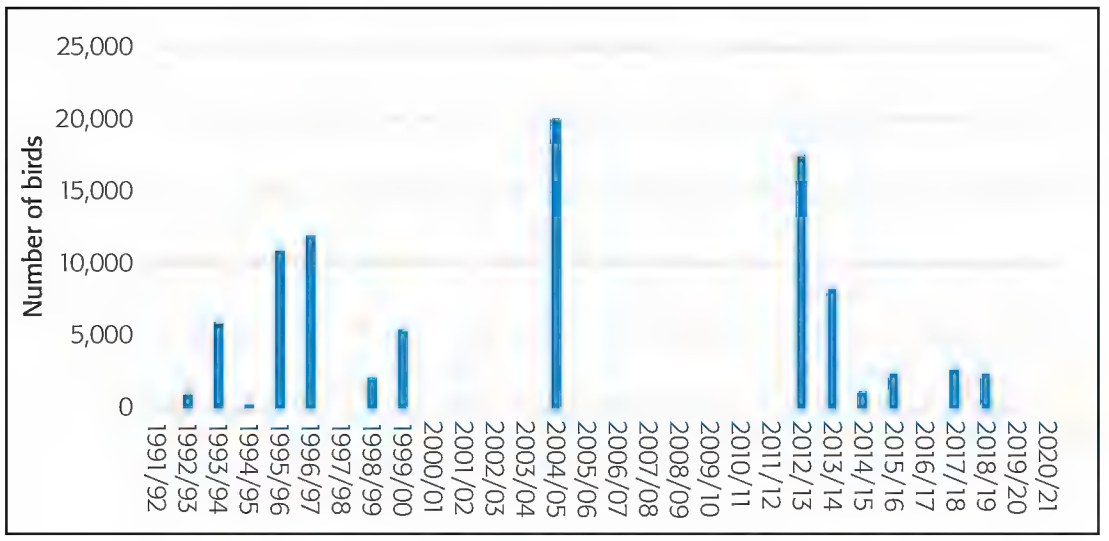


Figure 10. The peak national count of Pink-footed Geese at Peppermill Dam, Fife, 1991/92 to 2020/21. Note that there were no counts in winters 2003/04, 2005/06, 2006/07, 2016/17 and 2019/20.

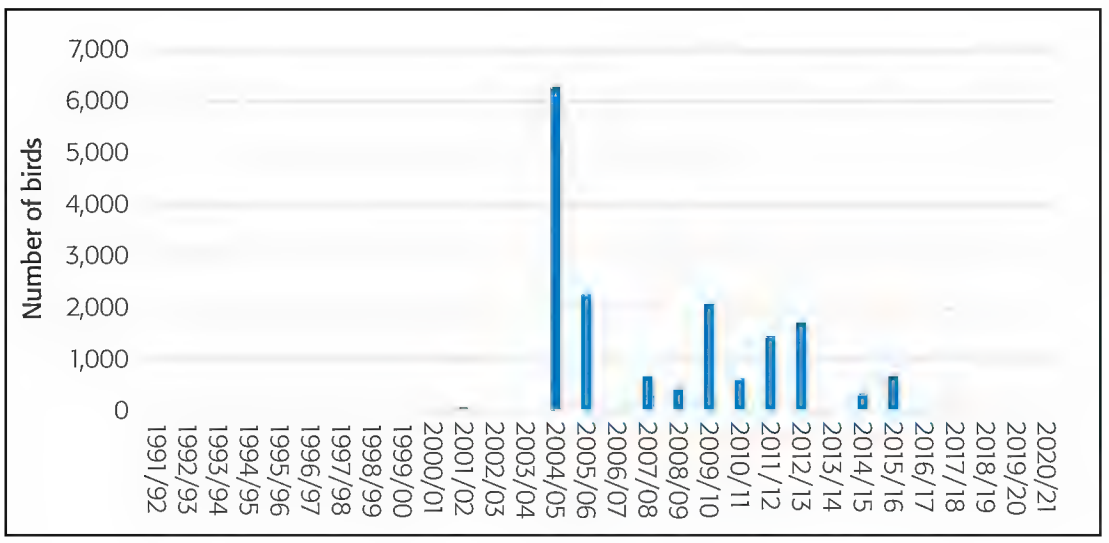


Figure 11. The peak national count of Pink-footed Geese at Rossie Bog, Fife, 1991/92 to 2020/21. Note that there were no counts in winters 2002/03, and 2003/04, 2006/07 and 2017/18 to 2019/20.

8) *Loch Gelly.* Pink-footed Geese were not recorded roosting at this site until winter 2005/06 with intermittent counts since then but were recorded most winters since 2011/12 with a peak of 4,600 on 28 October 2018. Probably under-recorded as geese often fed to the west of the site.
9) *Loch Glow.* Other than a small roost flock in winter 1991/92, peaking at 226 on 10 November 1991 and 154 on 16 November 2001, no Pink-footed Geese have been regularly recorded roosting at this site.
10) *Peppermill Dam.* This was the only significant Pink-footed Goose roost identified in west Fife, but its use was inconsistent based on national counts only (Figure 10). Peak count 2,000 on 14 November 2011.
11) *Rossie Bog.* This site was counted from winter 2000/01 mainly for the national counts and recorded occasionally high counts with a peak of 6,290 in November 2004 (Figure 11). Additional counts recorded peaks of 6,500 on 8 November 2012 and 7,810 on 14 February 2016. The regular presence of feeding birds in the area suggested that the importance of this site was under-recorded.
12) *Other sites.* The remaining sites identified were very rarely used by Pink-footed Geese. 400 recorded at Lochmill Loch on 30 October 2001 was the only count for that site. Occasional records for Tayport Bay (peak 150 on 1 October 2013) were probably linked to the roost at Tentsmuir Point whilst 349 at Torry Bay on 19 October 2019 was unusual for that location. Counts for Morton Lochs were of feeding birds only and whilst Mountcastle Quarry, which adjoins Letham flood, often had feeding flocks present during the 2010s no positive roost counts were received. The previously important roosting site at Mugdrum Island area had no reports of roosting geese during the study period although feeding flocks regularly occurred east of Newburgh.

Table 2. The number of observations of feeding and resting Pink-footed Geese used to prepare Figures 12a–c. Excludes duplicate or multiple counts, unless of different flocks, for each 1 km² on specific dates.

Years	No. of observations
1991/92–2000/01	928
2001/02–2010/11	726
2011/12–2020/21	1,142
1991/92–2020/21	2,796

Feeding areas

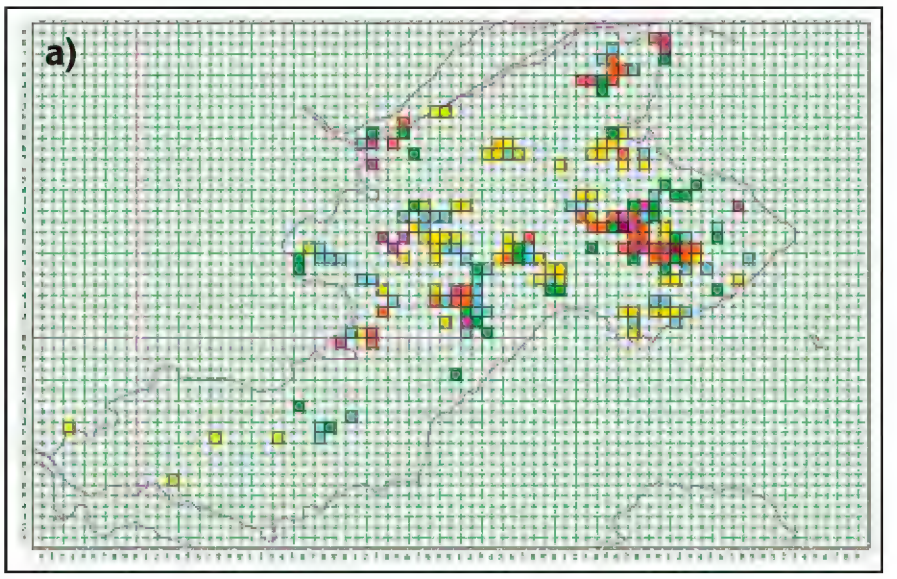
Prior to undertaking roost counts, searches of known and potential feeding areas were undertaken to locate birds and determine if they were associated with a specific roost. Recording direction of arrival or departure at a roost enabled such assessments to be made, although geese could adjust their arrival direction from a feeding area and give misleading information. Although data were collected as far as possible as a six-figure OS grid reference, feeding and resting distribution as presented is based on 1 km squares. This entailed amending the mapped data to remove either duplicate counts or amalgamating counts where they were known to refer to different flocks within a specific square on the same date. Thus, of 3,100 feeding observations that were recorded, removal of duplicate or multiple counts resulted in 2,796 observations being used to map feeding distribution over the three 10-year time periods (Table 2). There was a difference in the frequency of counts for each 1 km² but as the recording of feeding locations was not based on a systematic and consistent basis every year then inevitably there was some bias to those squares in areas where geese were recorded, but this indicated the areas regularly used by the geese. Feeding areas referred to birds actively grazing or resting in fields or at/by the roost site.

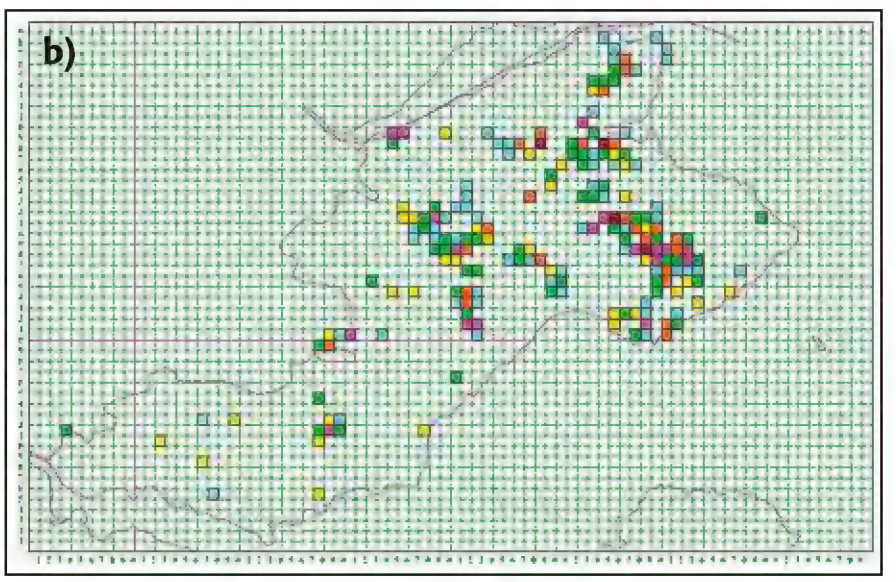
The feeding distribution from all reports by 1 km² of Pink-footed Geese in Fife during the whole study period showed a clear concentration in east/north-east Fife. This distribution was refined into three 10-year time periods (1991/92 to 2000/01, 2001/02 to 2010/11 and 2011/12 to 2020/21) together with the range of peak flock size recorded in each square (Figures 12a–c).

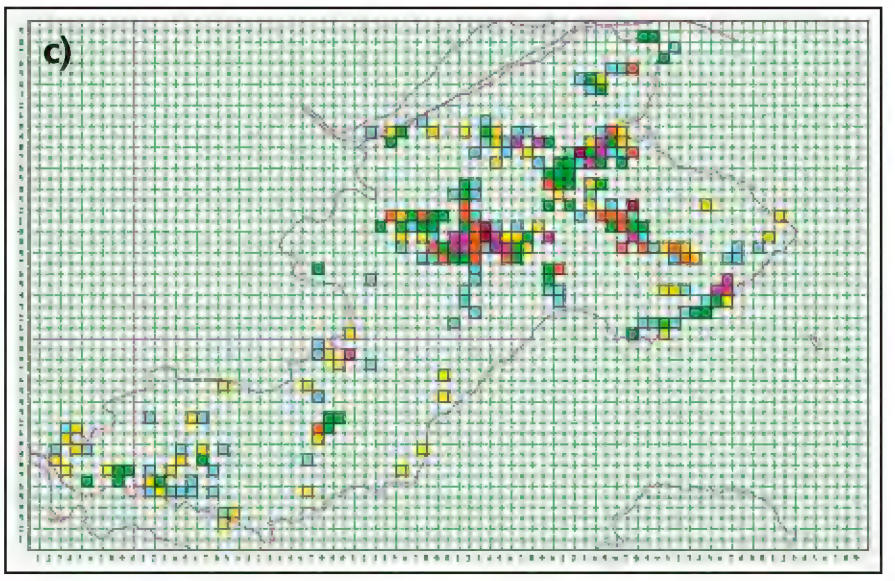
A change occurred in the distribution from a noticeable concentration around the Cameron Reservoir roost site in 1991/92 to 2000/01 to an increase in both numbers and distribution around

Figure 12a–c. a) Distribution and maximum numbers of Pink-footed Geese feeding in Fife by 1 km^2 1991/92 2000/01. **b)** Distribution and maximum numbers of Pink-footed Geese feeding in Fife by 1 km^2 2001/02 to 2010/11. **c)** Distribution and maximum numbers of Pink-footed Geese feeding in Fife by 1 km^2 2001/02 to 2020/21. Maps prepared using DMAP.

Key for numbers
1 = 1 to 250 (yellow)
2 = 251 to 1,000 (blue)
3 = 1001 to 2,500 (green)
4 = 2,501 to 5,000 (orange)
5 = 5,001–10,000 (pink)
6 = 10,000+ (dark red/brown)







and west of the Eden Estuary associated with the greater use of existing roosts and the occupancy of new roosts in that area by 2001/02 to 2020/21 (Figures 12a–c). An increased occurrence of birds along the south-east coastal strip was also evident along with declines in the Carriston Reservoirs area, around Tentsmuir/Morton Lochs and the Upper Tay area. More occurrences were also recorded in west Fife by the third period. Thus, a distinct change occurred in the extent and frequency in use of specific areas as well as in the number of birds involved.

Habitat use by feeding/resting geese

Of the 3,100 records available from the study the specific habitat used by the birds was identified on 2,790 occasions. These were broken down into five broad habitat types - arable/crop, stubble/plough, grass/pasture, water/wetland and coastal/estuarine. How specific fields were cropped varied between years as did the timing of stubble ploughing. This, combined with the variation in coverage of feeding areas, meant it was not possible to undertake a detailed assessment of cropping patterns and their use by geese. However, it gave an indication of the habitat preferences of the geese, the use of each habitat type during each 10-year period of the study and how this changed as the winter progressed from September to December and January to May (Tables 3 and 4).

Overall, habitat use was consistent throughout the study period although it varied within winters especially with regard to the use of stubble which was favoured early in the autumn and winter and increasingly so in the last period. Interestingly the use of crop fields such as winter barley and wheat represented generally less than 20% of field use overall with pasture becoming increasingly favoured in late winter and spring.

Table 3. Percentage of feeding and resting Pink-footed Geese in Fife by habitat type 1991/92 to 2020/21.

	Arable/ crop	Stubble/ plough	Grass/ pasture	Water/ wetland	Coastal/ estuarine	No. of records
1991/92–2000/01	14	25	56	1	3	901
2001/02–2010/11	21	26	46	4	2	729
2011/12–2020/21	16	33	44	5	2	1,160
1991/92–2020/21	17	29	49	4	2	2,790

Table 4. Percentage of use by feeding and resting Pink-footed Geese of each habitat type in early and late winter in Fife 1991/92 to 2020/21.

	Arable/crop		Stubble/plough		Grass/pasture		Water/wetland		Coastal/estuarine	
	Sep–Dec	Jan–May	Sep–Dec	Jan–May	Sep–Dec	Jan–May	Sep–Dec	Jan–May	Sep–Dec	Jan–May
1991/92–2000/01	6	8	17	8	14	42	0	1	2	1
2001/02–2010/11	6	15	22	4	11	36	2	3	2	0
2011/12–2020/21	2	7	64	5	8	7	4	1	1	0
1991/92–2020/21	5	12	22	7	11	38	1	2	2	1

Discussion

National goose counts provide only a snapshot of the presence of roosting geese and their distribution in Fife and do not reflect how sites (both roosting and feeding areas) are used during and between winters. They show the considerable fluctuation in numbers which occurred between years and that numbers recorded in Fife on the count dates did not increase in line with the overall population increase in Britain as a whole (WWT 1961–2020), but that individual site counts on other dates often exceeded the specific coordinated count totals. In Fife the November count was usually higher than the October count, although since 1990 the latter month has been the preferred date for the national count of Pink-footed Geese based on the apparent major arrival of the species at key sites during October (Newton *et al.* 1990, Mitchell & Hearn 2004). Thus birds appeared to disperse to Fife after the main arrival in October. These findings emphasised the value of monitoring numbers throughout the winter to determine when birds favour an area, whether for roosting or feeding, whether any change was occurring to that pattern of use and indeed where conflicts with agricultural interests may arise as has been identified in earlier studies when goose numbers were far lower than they are now (Newton & Campbell 1973, Bell 1988, Bell *et al.* 1988, Matthews 1992, Fox *et al.* 1994, Stenhouse 1996, Mitchell & Hearn 2004).

Whilst many roost sites did not have sufficient data to fully assess their value to roosting geese throughout the winter the four locations with more detailed counts emphasised both the differences in use which occurred and how geese were opportunistic in making use of new roost sites as they became available (Brown & Brown 1992) or if circumstances changed through factors such as disturbance (Brotherston 1964, Bell & Newton 1995, Newton *et al.* 1973), new feeding opportunities (Forshaw 1983, Gill *et al.* 1997) or a combination of these. The loss of Cameron Reservoir as the pre-eminent roost site in Fife by the early 2000s saw an apparent shift to Kilconquhar Loch in the mid-2000s then an increase in use of the Eden Estuary and then The Wilderness near Ladybank, a change which was also mirrored by a redistribution in numbers and feeding areas more closely associated with those latter two key roosts.

However, linking roosts to feeding areas was fraught with difficulties. Feeding birds did not always make use of nearby roost sites and it has been shown that birds moved between different roosts over the winter (Giroux 1991). In addition some feeding areas were probably transitory in nature and used less frequently as the birds took advantage of a particular feeding opportunity or were disturbed. Pink-footed Geese can move considerable distances between roosting and feeding

areas (Brown & Brown 1992, Brown, 2007), although this can vary depending upon suitable feeding (Bell 1988), but large numbers of birds continued to feed in the vicinity of Cameron Reservoir long after the roost declined in importance (Brown 2017) indicating a strong association with favoured feeding areas as long as the cropping regime provided suitable feeding. Conversely, regular feeding flocks in the vicinity of sites such as Carriston Reservoirs and Letham did not apparently favour roosting at nearby water bodies (pers. obs. and national count data). Another complicating factor was birds feeding in Fife but not roosting within the area. The increased observations during the 2010s of geese arriving and feeding along the south-east coast (Chris Smout pers. comm.) was thought to be related to birds roosting at Aberlady Bay, Lothian although this was not confirmed (John Harrison pers. comm.). In addition, on 9 November 2010 some 12,500 birds left a feeding area north-west of the Eden Estuary and headed off to the west/north-west in the upper Tay direction whilst 4,980 from a flock of 14,350 feeding to the north of Cameron Reservoir on 18 November 2019 headed south at dusk but apparently did not roost elsewhere in Fife (pers. obs.). It is also unclear if the birds roosting at Tentsmuir all feed locally or roost from feeding areas to the north in Angus (and vice-versa) and feeding birds noted near Newburgh are presumed to roost outwith Fife as no roosts were recorded from the nearby Mugdrum Island. Thus, even after 30 years of monitoring there is an on-going need to monitor roosts and feeding areas, their linkages and identify any change in use and pattern that might occur.

This is important for the site protection process as it is clearly essential to identify key sites, what changes are occurring in their use, identify the reasons for this where possible and undertake appropriate management prescriptions to try and address the changes as has been suggested for several sites (Brown & Brown 2007, 2009, 2011, Brown 2009, 2017). It also requires a dynamic and responsive system for designating new sites as they are identified and become important for the species. For instance, The Wilderness is now the most important Pink-footed Goose roost site in Fife yet has no protection whatsoever. Consideration also needs to be given to providing some protection to regular feeding areas given that the geese spend most of the day away from the roost location. Disturbance and shooting pressure, including at a roost site, can seriously impact upon how geese use an area. There is anecdotal evidence that shooting in the vicinity of The Wilderness (but not directly at the roost) during the 2010s had resulted in geese leaving the area for long periods but in the absence of any oversight and controls over organised shooting, and even a lack of reporting shooting bags, there is an obvious concern that this will become unsustainable. Although Goose Management Schemes have been established in Scotland (Scottish Executive 2000, Scottish Natural Heritage 2000, Bainbridge 2017) these are very much based on reducing specific conflicts between farmers and geese rather than giving statutory protection to feeding areas. The need for protecting both roosts and associated key feeding areas would be a positive step to implement as part of an overall goose management strategy although it may need to be a flexible approach as has been suggested for Taiga Bean Geese *Anser fabilis* (Thornton *et al.* 2021). Ultimately, there is little point in protecting a roost site if feeding areas are also not taken into consideration in the site protection and management process.

The preference for Pink-footed Geese in Fife to use stubble fields in autumn and early winter is similar to the pattern identified from other studies in Scotland (Brotherston 1964, Bell 1988, Newton & Campbell 1973, Stenhouse 1996) although there was clearly an increase in use of this habitat in the early winter of the 10-year study period 2011–2020. Changes in agricultural practices, perhaps associated with climate change, such as early removal of stubble and an increase in autumn sown crops together with under-sowing of stubble fields may either impact upon goose distribution or increase the potential for conflict with farming. This further reinforces the need for protected feeding areas, appropriately managed for geese, to form part of the overall goose management process to minimise the extent of any conflicts that might arise. If geese benefit from farming practices then it is important that a system is established which enables those benefits to continue without adversely affecting wider land use. Obviously, it cannot be

predicted how geese will respond to specific management actions but as described previously for Cameron Reservoir (Brown 2017) it is only by on-going monitoring, site designation and the identification of management prescriptions when necessary that the future of Pink-footed Geese as an integral part of the wintering bird population of Fife will be assured.

Acknowledgements

A large number of observers, as well as assisting with the national counts, provided additional data during the study and their support of the project is greatly appreciated. Special thanks must go to some observers for either their long-term commitment to providing data or the amount of data gathered during particular winters. Les Hatton then Ranald Strachan provided invaluable data for roosting birds using the Eden Estuary throughout the study period as did Tom Cunningham for Tentsmuir Point. George M Adam, Malcolm J Bayne, George Brown, Anne-Marie & Chris Smout, the late Mike Ramage and Richard Smith made extensive and invaluable contributions. The Goose and Swan Monitoring Programme (GSMP) (supported by the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, and Scottish Natural Heritage) is thanked for providing access to and allowing use of GSMP data and we are grateful to the WeBS partnership (the British Trust for Ornithology, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee) for access to relevant WeBS counts. Finally, Fife Bird Club is thanked for allowing, via their bird Recorders, access to data submitted for the annual Fife Bird Report.

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Revised ms accepted July 2022

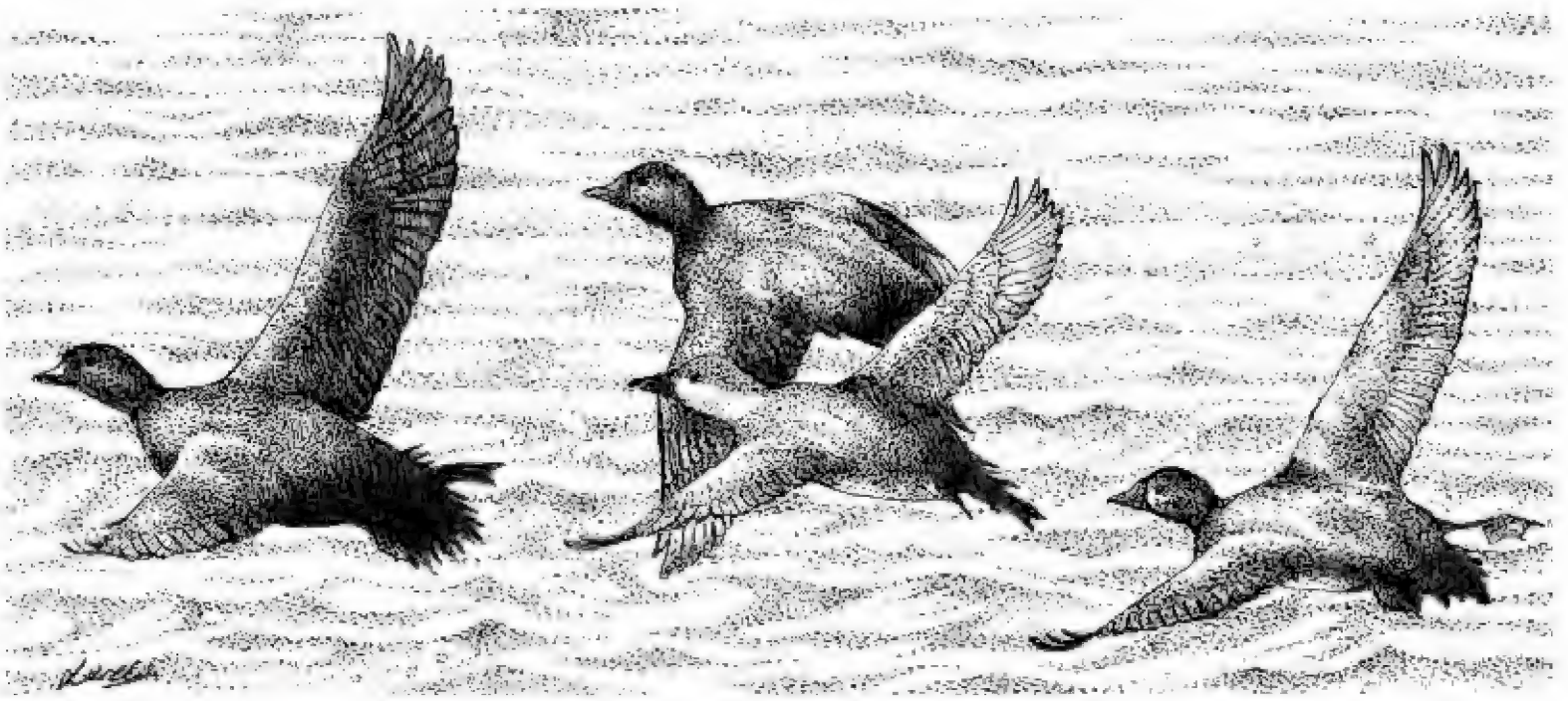

Plate 2. Common Scoters reached exceptional numbers off Dornoch, Moray Firth, Highland. © *Lyn Wells*

Changes to the Common Scoter population wintering off Dornoch, Moray Firth, Highland

D. PATTERSON, D. MACASKILL, D. TANNER & J. GRAHAM

Common Scoters have been present in exceptional numbers off Dornoch, within the Outer Dornoch Firth Section of the Moray Firth Special Protection Area (SPA), for at least three consecutive winters. The sustained pressure of c. 6,000 foraging scoters on their prey resource may have caused a progressive change in scoter feeding distribution during late winter. Common Scoters moved away from their primary forage site earlier each year, relying increasingly upon a secondary forage zone along the open coast. The requirements for a sufficiently large/high quality forage resource to support such a large population at this latitude, combined with birds switching to a secondary forage zone during cold temperatures, may have caused a proportion of scoters to vacate the study area in late winter.

Introduction

In Scotland, as in other parts of their range, large wintering flocks of Common Scoters *Melanitta nigra* congregate in shallow inshore areas, frequenting water depths of *c.* 20 m, where they dive to forage within soft substrates on the seabed (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Their diet comprises mainly bivalve molluscs, with other species incorporated less frequently, such as small crabs, small fish and gastropods (Madsen, 1954). The benthic prey within these sedimentary habitats is strongly influenced by sea-bed hydrodynamic stress and hence this can be an important determinant of benthic distribution. Therefore, food resources available to Common Scoter are unlikely to be uniformly distributed, with certain areas of seabed yielding higher rates of energy intake than others (Kaiser *et al.* 2006).

The Moray Firth has previously been identified as the most northerly UK stronghold for Common Scoter (Forrester *et al.* 2007). It is now designated as a Special Protection Area for Common Scoter with an estimated non-breeding population of 5,479. The Moray Firth SPA also supports

a range of other seaducks, divers and marine waterbirds (Lawson *et al.*, 2015; SNH, 2016). The Outer Dornoch Firth is one of the multiple distinct sections within the wider SPA that have underpinned previous surveys.

Common Scoter data presented within Owen *et al.* (1986), show that the Outer Dornoch Firth section supported very high numbers of birds for two winter seasons, peaking at 7,000 for the winters of 1970/71 and 1972/73. Thereafter, Common Scoter flocks were not recorded to exceed 3,000 birds. Over this period, the sites that have attracted the highest level of scoter use have generally always been Nairn/Culbin, Burghead Bay & Spey Bay (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

Woodward & Humphreys (2018) highlighted that it would be beneficial to know more about the foraging ecology of Common Scoter and how this relates to local knowledge of Protected Areas for this species. Conservation advice for this Protected Area reaffirms that Common Scoter is vulnerable to changes in availability of prey. It also identifies the need for more local information to inform a better understanding of how birds use this SPA (NatureScot, 2021). This paper reports on local scoter foraging patterns to increase our knowledge of areas used by Common Scoter in the Outer Dornoch Firth section of this SPA.

Methods

For the purposes of this survey work, the Outer Dornoch Firth section was divided into four manageable sub-sections. From north to south these are: Golspie, Embo, Dornoch and Portmahomack (see Fig. 1).

The Dornoch sub-section is largely dominated by the currents generated through the ebb and flow associated with the large Dornoch Firth Estuary (see Fig. 1). The other sub-sections also have some influence of estuary outflows, albeit much smaller systems, including Loch Fleet and Inver Bay. Therefore, Golspie and Embo comprise mainly 'open-coast' habitats, compared to the Dornoch sub-section dominated by its large estuary.

The Portmahomack sub-section comprises a very large and sheltered shallow bay (largely <10 m in depth). On this basis, the sub-sections of Golspie and Embo have been termed 'open-coast', in contrast to Portmahomack and Dornoch sub-sections.

Throughout the main wintering period (November to March, inclusive), observations of scoters were carried out on a regular basis (either once or twice per month) within sub-sections. Scans of coastal waters were undertaken with binoculars (10 × 40) and telescopes (20–60 × 80) to locate scoter flocks visible from shore. Observations were undertaken mainly during calm sea

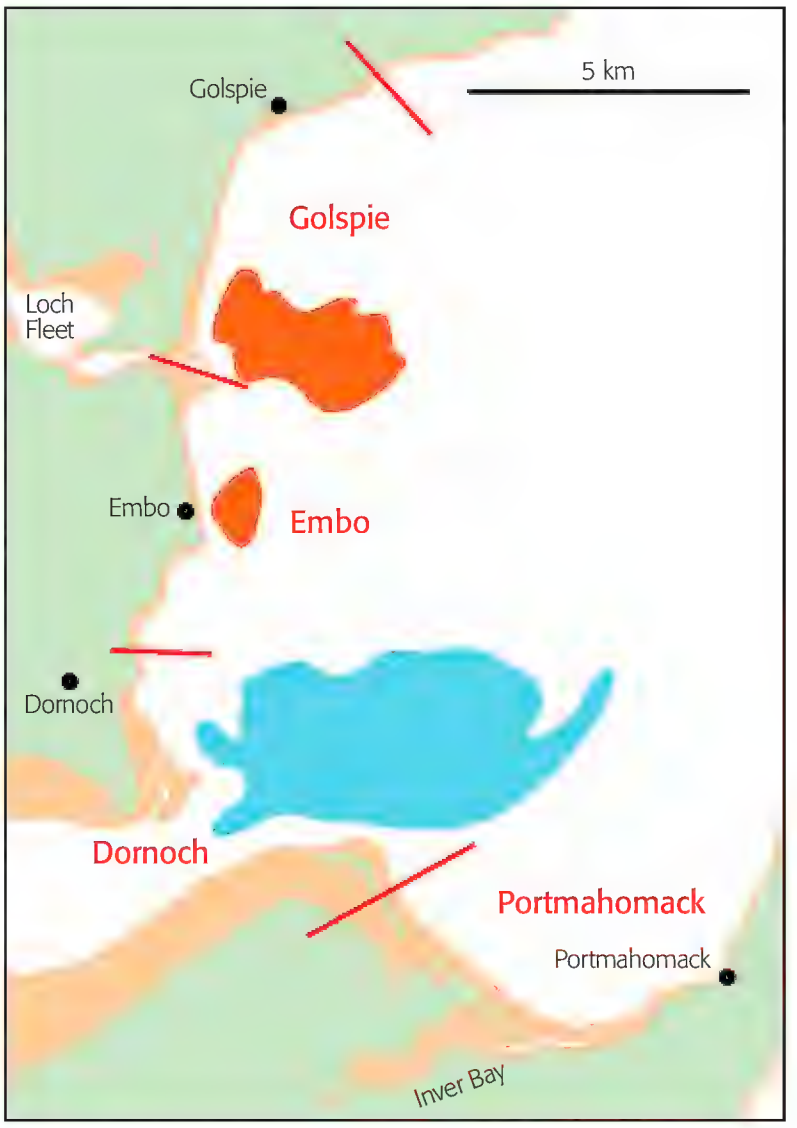

Figure 1. The Outer Dornoch Firth section divided into four sub-sections for the purposes of this survey. Primary (blue) and secondary (orange) forage zones for Common Scoter within the Outer Dornoch Firth section (November 2018–March 2019, November 2019–March 2020, November 2020–March 2021, $n = 83$ flocks; 186,544 birds). N.B. Mapped scoter forage zones include overlapping flocks, representing the most frequently used locations in the Outer Dornoch Firth. Other foraging areas used less frequently are not shown but are included within the sample size.

conditions, using vantage points to assist coverage of offshore flocks (as per Gilbert *et al.* 1998). A 'WhatsApp' group was used to facilitate communication on flock sizes, location and movements during COVID-19.

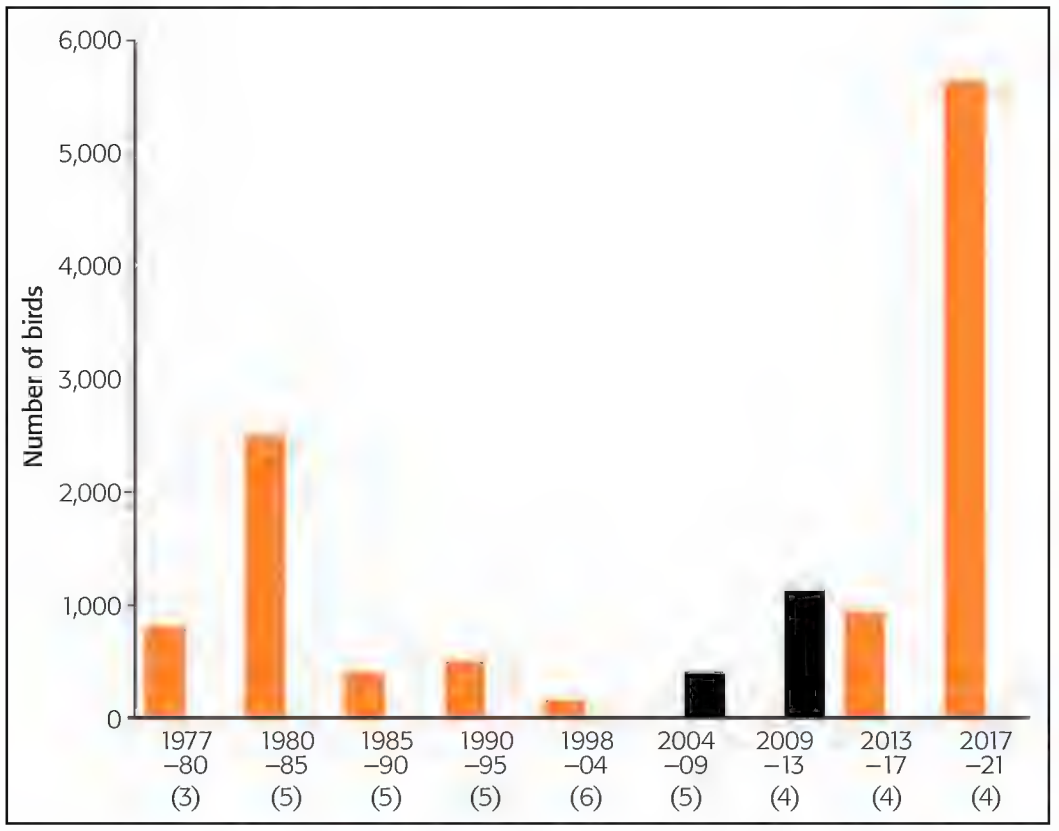

Figure 2. Average maximum number of Common Scoters recorded in the Outer Dornoch Firth section, November–March (1977–2021). Note: Averaged highest counts averaged for each individual winter season for each particular set of years (in brackets, as above). Data replicated from Kalejta-Summer & Butterfield (2006) for 1977–80 to 1998–2004. Peak counts averaged from *Highland Bird Reports* (black). Authors' own dedicated seaduck data and minor use of *Highland Bird Report* data, combined for 2017–2021.

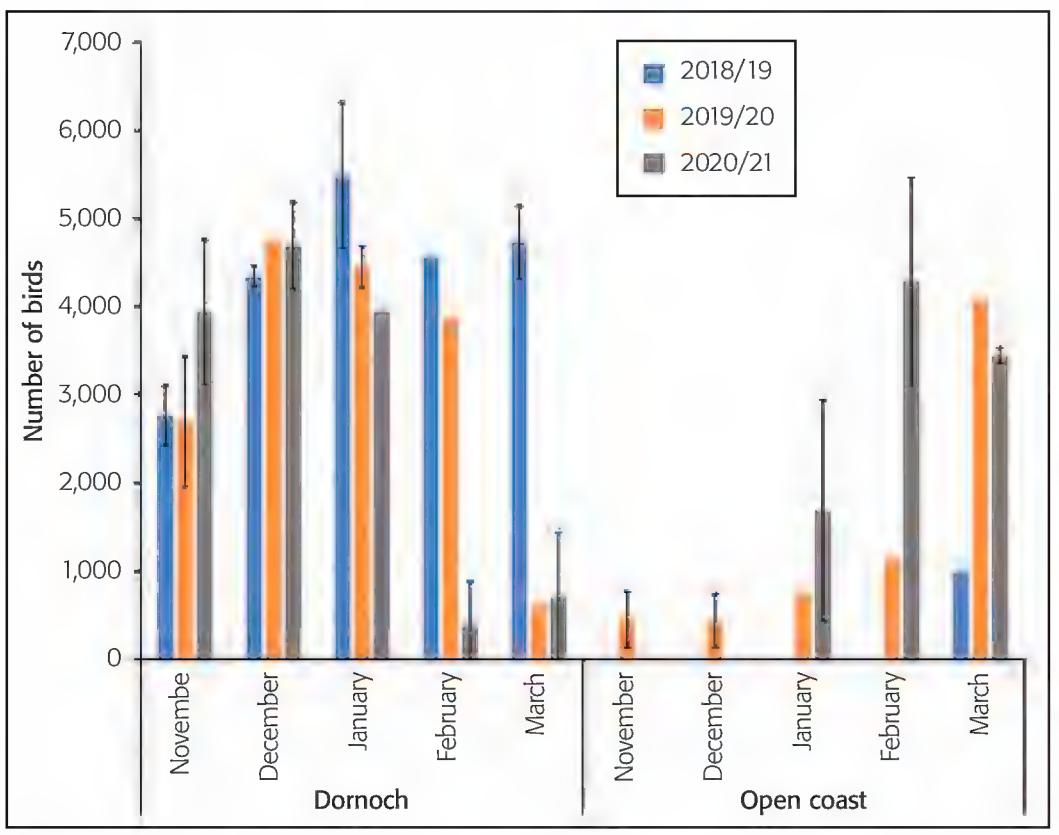

Figure 3. Monthly average of Common Scoters using the Dornoch sub-section compared to the combined 'open-coast' sub-sections (2018/19, 2019/20 & 2020/21).

Results

To put our Common Scoter results into a historical context and to give them greater clarity, data from other sources was utilised, as presented within Kalejta-Summers & Butterfield (2006), which provides a baseline from earlier published seaduck surveys (Mudge & Allen, 1980; Evans, 1998). This is presented in Fig. 2, combined with Common Scoter data sought from other sources, such as *Highland Bird Reports* (*HBRs*), Symonds & Vittery (2018), Forrester *et al.* (2007) and the authors' own recent data.

The scoter data in Fig. 2 may not be fully representative from *ad hoc* observations, which is why data sourced from dedicated seaduck surveys in suitable conditions (in orange) are differentiated from *ad hoc* observations potentially in varying conditions (in black).

Results collected over three consecutive winters (November–March, 2018–2021), show that Common Scoter had a strong preference to forage within the Dornoch sub-section, often utilizing the outer estuarine zone of the Dornoch Firth, throughout most of the winter period (Fig. 1). However, within the last two consecutive winters (2019/20 & 2020/21), scoters vacated the previously preferred Dornoch foraging grounds in late winter, switching to forage along the open-coast at Golspie and Embo, several kilometres to the north (see Fig. 1 & 3).

Thereafter, the open-coast zones were the preferred foraging areas, involving both Embo and Golspie sub-sections, with only occasional smaller flocks venturing back to Dornoch, but not persisting there. Both Embo and Golspie open-coast sub-sections supported high numbers of scoter in late winter, which have not been recorded previously for that time of year for such a sustained period.

Portmahomack remained little used during the winter, but instead, it has been used extensively during April–May, outwith this wintering study period (Patterson *et al.* 2022).

In addition, notable movements of Common Scoters took place past Tarbat Ness in late winter 2021, where thousands of birds were observed (early morning) vacating the Outer Dornoch Firth section, flying south towards the Moray coast, on the south side of the Moray Firth. From 27 February–27 March, four significant flocks, accounting for a total of 4,310 birds (range, 360–2,000), along with several smaller flocks, left the study area. Thereafter, Common Scoter counts were much lower (c. 3,600), perhaps indicating that the majority flying past Tarbat Ness had indeed left the area. In the following winter season (2021/22), Common Scoters had all but vacated the Outer Dornoch Firth section, with a peak count of only 340 individuals (Oct 2021).

Plate 3. Part of a very small group of Common Scoter that remained to enjoy the open coast off Embo, Moray Firth, March 2022. © *Andy Williams*

Discussion

These observations have identified primary and secondary foraging zones for Common Scoter within the Outer Dornoch Firth section. Clearly the distribution of foraging scoters will be influenced by benthic communities, which can be patchy in their distribution. Therefore, certain areas may yield higher rates of very small bivalve prey favoured by scoters, than others (Kaiser *et al.*, 2006; Fox, 2003).

Changes to the wintering population

The Dornoch sub-section, strongly influenced by the Dornoch Firth estuary, has a history of scoter use, albeit normally in just low or moderate numbers (Fig. 2), Evans (1998); Kalejta-Summers & Butterfield (2006). Therefore, the increase of wintering scoters using the Dornoch sub-section (and subsequently, Golspie and Embo sub-sections) is unprecedented in recent history. For example, a full coordinated waterbird survey of the Moray Firth in 2020, undertaken by dedicated volunteers and overseen by NatureScot, recorded the notably high proportion of scoter using the Outer Dornoch Firth section at 76% (n=6,124, January) and 92% (n=7,377, March). The Common Scoter wintering population has shown an extraordinary increase within the Outer Dornoch Firth.

Change/depletion of forage value

The fact that a high number of Common Scoter preferred to forage for most of the winter within the Dornoch sub-section, associating with a large estuary outflow and over three consecutive winters, suggests that this sub-section can be identified as a primary foraging zone. In comparison, the open-coast habitats of Golspie and Embo sub-sections may hold less suitable and/or available scoter prey.

Scoter flocks often fragment and break-out from the core wintering site at Dornoch, around mid to late March (Patterson, 2019). This late winter behaviour is typified at other scoter sites too, including Wales (Smith *et al.* 2007) and at Denmark (T. Fox pers. comm.*)*. This suggests it is likely to be related to scoter physiological condition, perhaps at a time where birds seek out fresh or specific forage sources to 'fuel-up' pre-migration. For example, Durnick *et al.* 1993, recorded high fat-scores in scoters, especially females, during a mass drowning event in March at Hanstholm, Denmark.

However, the surveys reported here show that scoters switched to utilize open coast habitats earlier in each successive winter season (see Fig. 3), suggesting that movements to the secondary forage zone were more likely to be driven by local factors, such as forage depletion. Thus, although the Dornoch sub-section is clearly the favoured forage zone, it may be less able to sustain very high levels of scoter use through successive years. The information on primary and secondary foraging areas provides valuable baseline data, as benthos communities and their distribution can remain stable for some years if currents and suspended sediments do not drastically change (Degraer 1999).

No doubt, the sustained high wintering population puts more pressure on the available prey resource, especially in late winter. In addition, the winter of 2020/21 turned out to be the coldest in Dornoch for 10 years, with an average minimum winter temperature of -1°C, with the previous two winters averaging 0°C (WWO, 2021). In northern Scotland, birds choosing to winter in the Moray Firth face limited day length to forage which coincides with the coldest months (Patterson, 2021). Sustained cold winter temperatures have been shown to increase dive frequency, resulting in the cost/benefit ratio of feeding to be optimized (Nilson 1970; Systad & Bustness 2001). Vaitkus & Bubinas (2001), supports the assumption that under adverse winter conditions, large seaduck populations are likely to over-exploit their benthic food stocks, forcing populations to gradually move.

The final winter season (2020/21) of the large wintering population culminated with early morning mass move-out events, with scoter flocks flying low over the sea heading towards the Moray coast. These birds had obviously decided it was time to move-on, which coincided with other birds using the secondary forage zone of the open coast. It is very unlikely that this mass departure of scoters was related to human disturbance, as this is considered scarce during the core wintering period of November–March. Has the gradual change in foraging patterns, which led many birds to vacate the survey section within the last winter season, been driven by food shortage? If so, then it is perhaps no coincidence that Common Scoters almost entirely vacated the Outer Dornoch Firth section during the subsequent full winter season (2021/22, October–March). This highlights the importance of Dornoch and also stresses the importance of secondary forage areas (off Golspie and Embo), which should be available to birds if they are needed.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following, who either provided support and encouragement or were just happy to chat about marine scoters over the last three-four years: Louise Campbell, Jack Farge, Tony Fox, Jan Gebbie, Siân Haddon, David Law, Paul Longbottom, Carl Mitchell,

NatureScot, Emma Philip, John Poyner, Karen Reid, Norrie Russel, Bozena Summers, Mary Tanner, Kate Thompson & Lyn Wells. I wish to acknowledge the work of David Butterfield, who spent so much time on waterfowl surveys and research, including seaducks in the Moray Firth

Lyn kindly provided the header illustration. Andy Williams kindly provided an image of Common Scoters using the survey area. We are also very grateful to Carl, Kate, Tony & Lyn for commenting on previous drafts.

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Revised ms accepted September 2022

Tawny Owl preying upon Swallow chicks

During the breeding season Tawny Owls *Strix aluco* are known to exploit a wide range of prey, which often includes birds (Macdonald 1969, Glue 1972). From personal experience of checking large numbers of owl nesting boxes in Highland it is mostly recently fledged birds that are preyed upon.

In June 2022, a mini nest box camera was positioned to view a Swallow *Hirundo rustica* nest on a rafter in a storage shed at Alladale in Sutherland. Access to the nest was via a large sliding door that was kept open. On 25 June the nest contained five healthy swallow chicks around seven days old. On the morning of 27 June it was noted that the nest was empty. Analysis of the video taken by the camera showed an adult Tawny Owl flying up to the nest at 01:54 hrs, stretching out its claws and grabbing a couple of chicks. At 02:59 hrs the bird returned, landed on the rim of the nest and took a further two chicks. Twenty-one minutes later it returned, again landed on the rim of the nest and took the remaining chick.

Petty (1999) states that analysis of pellets provides the best information on mammal prey, but nest box examination provides the best information on birds taken. Bird remains in pellets often cannot be identified to species level, so pellet analysis often lumps together birds e.g. small passerines, whereas feather remains in boxes can be identified to species level. Nestling birds are likely to be overlooked by both methods as prey remains from them will be minimal. As a footnote in 1985 I found some adult swallow feathers in a box at Drumnadrochit. I always wondered how the owl had caught such an agile bird. Perhaps, like these chicks, it had been lifted of its nest at night.

Plate 4. Swallow chicks in nest prior to attack. © *Ryan Munro*

Plate 5. Owl uses both talons to grab chicks in first attack. © *Ryan Munro*

Plate 6. Owl removing chicks from nest. © *Ryan Munro*

Plate 7. Owl returns for second time and lands on rim of nest. © *Ryan Munro*

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Revised ms accepted August 2022

Slavonian Grebes associating with seaducks in the Moray Firth

Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus* has a localised wintering distribution within Scotland, favouring shallow waters, especially estuaries and bays (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Diet of overwintering birds in the southern Baltic Sea has been found to consist mainly of demersal gobies (Gobiidae), frequenting sandy bottom substrates (Sonntag *et al.* 2009).

In terms of foraging ecology, Slavonian Grebes feed mainly during daylight (Cramp & Simmons 1977). They are regularly solitary but will also feed in larger grebe groups and have been noted using synchronized diving in rougher water (Bergman 1936). Interestingly, Paulson (1969) records mutually beneficial foraging with Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata* in America. However, it appears that a close foraging association by Slavonian Grebes with seaducks may not yet have been documented in Scottish or UK waters.

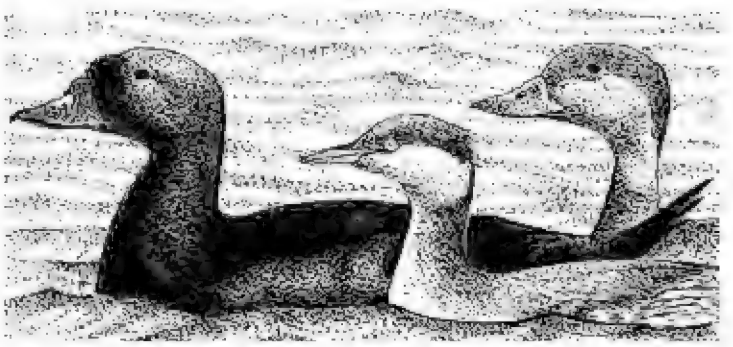

Plate 8. Wintering Slavonian Grebe associating with Common Scoter, Golspie, Moray Firth, Highland. © *Lyn Wells*

Observations and counts of wintering Slavonian Grebes were undertaken off the Sutherland coast; Golspie to Dornoch, from December 2017–March 2022. Data were collected on Slavonian Grebes closely associating and/or fully integrated as part of seaduck flocks. Observations took place at least once per month (often twice monthly), by utilizing coastal vantage points, mostly during calm sea conditions (Gilbert *et al.* 1998).

Results from five winter seasons (October–March inclusive), indicated that Slavonian Grebes mainly foraged in isolation from other grebes, but also readily associated with conspecifics. However, over the five winter seasons, 49 (6%) of Slavonian Grebe (*n*=852 observations) were noted closely associating mainly with Common Scoters *Melanitta nigra,* but also with Long-tailed Ducks *Clangula hyemalis*, involving small seaduck groups and larger seaduck rafts. The best examples of flock integration involved small groups of Slavonian Grebes foraging within flocks of Common Scoters, all engaged in 'synchronized flock/group dive' essentially acting as one functioning diving/foraging unit (Patterson, 2021). So, why do some Slavonian Grebes forage with seaducks?

Byrkjedal *et al.* (2008) found Red-necked Grebes *P. grisegena* feeding either solitarily or in close association with Velvet Scoters *M. fusca* on the south-west Norwegian coast. They examined bottom substrates where the birds fed together and found polychaete worms vastly outnumbered other benthic taxa and were therefore probably the most likely grebe prey. These worms emerged out of the seabed when probed with a scuba-diver's knife, similar to the natural feeding actions of scoters. In addition, they discovered that Red-necked Grebes associating with scoters were mainly immature birds. As scoters may make prey more easily available to grebes, they constitute an attraction. The close association with scoters was found to diminish over the winter, as the young grebes gradually become more skilled at capturing fish, which are energetically more nutritious.

If the Slavonian Grebe foraging behaviour off the Sutherland coast is consistent with the findings from Norway, then it seems reasonable to suggest that Slavonian Grebes associating closely with seaducks may not just be feeding on fish, but instead, on bottom dwelling animals, such as polychaete worms.

As Slavonian Grebes are very small and slight, they can be difficult to detect within distant seaduck flocks (see Plate 8). This is especially the case during even slightly rough sea conditions (Evans 1998 & 2000), (e.g. over 2 Beaufort scale, own obs.). Therefore, even though these results suggest the number of Slavonian Grebes associating with seaducks may be relatively low (e.g. perhaps involving only immatures?), this foraging association can be very difficult to detect and is likely to be under-recorded.

Woodward & Humphries (2018) highlight that we could benefit from knowing more about the foraging ecology of the Slavonian Grebe in the marine environment. This is especially relevant where it is a qualifying species of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) (NatureScot, 2021). Therefore, this short note adds to our knowledge of the wintering foraging ecology within the Moray Firth SPA.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for their support and/or information on Slavonian Grebes and seaducks: Jen Graham, Paul Longbottom, Dean MacAskill, Carl Mitchell, NatureScot and Dave Tanner. Kate Thompson & Lyn Wells provided welcomed comments on previous drafts. Lyn kindly provided the illustration.

I thank all Dumfries & Galloway naturalists, who welcomed me there, including June Randell (FWAG), Stevie Cooper (WWT), Ken Bruce (North Solway RG) and to the memory of Ray Hawley (RSPB).

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Revised ms accepted September 2022

Cliff-nesting hirundines in Scotland

The recent note in *Scottish Birds* (Dudley *et al.* 2022) suggested that cliff-nesting hirundines in Scotland should be more fully documented. Local bird reports and atlases are an obvious source of records. *Fife Bird Reports* document the decline in House Martin *Delichon urbicum* nests on the sea cliffs at Kincraig Hill on the south coast of Fife. This previously well-known colony declined from 21 nests in 1985 to nil in 1998 and was mapped in the *Fife Bird Atlas* (Elkins *et al.* 2003) which embraced the 1990s. The most recent regional atlas (Elkins *et al.* 2016) also showed breeding at this site (tetrad NT49U) but this was based on one pair in 2010, being the only record since 1998. To my knowledge, no breeding at this site has been recorded since and this may be partly due to the increase in colonies on buildings in the nearby villages of Earlsferry and Elie - these being recorded in 2015 in the BTO's House Martin survey but not documented in *Fife Bird Reports.*

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Ms received September 2022

Aspects of a Brambling influx over the winter of 2021/22

During the 2021/22 winter more Bramblings *Fringilla montifringilla* than usual were reported from southern Scotland. Samples of this population were captured and ringed at two sites in the Moorfoot Hills, one near Heriot (Borders) operated since January 2017 and the other near Middleton (Midlothian) since November 2018. Both sites are baited with sunflower hearts in hanging feeders. Ringing was carried out approximately weekly at each site, but with variable amounts of netting and durations of sessions. Ringing sessions were standardised during winters 2020/21 and 2021/22 when TD registered the sites for the BTO's Winter Constant Effort Sites project. At this point WE and BL began assisting with ringing activities.

The total numbers of Bramblings ringed each winter between January 2017 and March 2022 are given in Table 1 and show the unpredictable nature of wintering Brambling populations. However, it should be noted that prior to winter 2021/22 the area of netting at both sites varied between winters and the number of visits made was affected by access restrictions imposed by COVID-19 regulations and roads blocked by snow on occasion.

Table 1. Number of Bramblings ringed.

	Site	
Winter	near Heriot	near Middleton
2017/18	0	nc
2018/19	40	100
2019/20	0	0
2020/21	30	81
2021/22	297	173

nc = no catching

At Heriot a total of 15 catching sessions commenced on 2 November 2021 and continued until 2 April 2022. At Middleton, due to game-shooting activities, ringing sessions did not commence until 22 November 2021 and a total of 12 sessions were conducted between then and 23 March, 2022. Standardised mist-netting and effort from first light for three hours was followed at each site. Mist netting was conducted only in conditions of light wind, generally below 16 kph (BTO, 2022). At Heriot the amount of netting deployed was 168 panel-metres, and at Middleton 81 panel-metres.

To allow direct comparisons between the two sites, only newly ringed birds or birds ringed elsewhere and then caught at a site between the end of November 2021 and the end of March 2022 are included in the analyses. Birds were aged and sexed according to Svensson (1992). Allowing for the different net-lengths and number of panels in each net used at each site, the number of Bramblings caught over the winter per net panel-metre was 0.09 at Heriot and 0.18 at Middleton.

The overall percentages of each age and sex in all catches at each site are presented in Table 2 and give rise to a series of Pearson's 2X2 contingency table Chi-square Tests, with Yate's correction factor, and Fisher's Combined Probability Tests for general trends. Approximately 24% of males caught at each site were adults and, similarly, around 22% of females at each site were adults. There was a ratio of 3.25 : 1 of first-winter birds to adults at both sites combined (3.17 : 1 male, 3.55 : 1 female). Statistically significantly more males than females were caught (approximately 2.8 :

Table 2. Comparison of Brambling catches at Heriot and Middleton, late November 2021 to late March 2022.

	near Heriot						near Middleton					
No. of individual birds handled	229						175					
Age & sex	1W, F	1W, M	Ad, F	Ad, M	all F	all M	1W, F	1W, M	Ad, F	Ad, M	all F	all M
% of catch in period	15.72	60.69	3.93	19.65			26.86	49.72	8.00	15.43		
% first-winter	76.41						76.58					
% adult			23.58						23.43			
% female					19.45						34.86	
% male						80.34						65.15

Plate 9. Brambling, Aboyne, North-East Scotland, February 2018. © *Harry Scott*

1) (X^2= 11.079, df = 1, p = 0.0009). More males than females were caught at each site (approximately 4 : 1 at Heriot and approximately 2 : 1 at Middleton). The results for the Pearson's 2X2 contingency chi-square tests on the proportion of each sex trapped at the two sites indicate that in both ages there were proportionately more males trapped at Heriot than at Middleton. Within the first-winter age group the difference was highly significant (X^2 = 7.04, df =1, p = 0.007) but marginally non-significant for adults (X^2 = 2.99, df =1, p = 0.084). To examine the data for a general trend in these results a Fisher's Combined Probability Test for males at both sites gave a highly significant result (X^2 value of 15.03, df = 4, p = 0.0046). So, there was good evidence that the proportion of males at Heriot was greater than at Middleton, in both adults and first-winter birds. There was no significant difference in the proportions of adults and first-winter birds at the two sites.

Table 3 details all the movements of birds from the two sites, reported by the end of November 2022 (Note that only single Bramblings had been caught at each site by this date in winter 2022/23).

It is well documented that the more brightly coloured, and often larger, males of passerine species tend to dominate females, and adults of both sexes dominate juveniles when competing at food sources such as feeders (Newton 1984, 1998). Bramblings undertake differential migration, with first-year birds and females moving further south than adult birds and males (Cramp *et al.* 1994). For example Arrizaga *et al.* (2012) found more females than males in a large winter roost in Iberia. The

Table 3. Movements of Bramblings at Heriot and Middleton, winter 2021/22.

Ring number & finding circumstances	Age & sex	Date	Location	Straight-line distance (kms)	Direction
S992107	1W, M	19.10.2017	Filey Brigg Country Park, North Yorkshire		
Recaptured	Ad, M	23.01.2022	near Heriot	246	NW
EL43728	1W, F	28.12.2018	Randaberg, Rogaland, NORWAY		
Recaptured	Ad, F	18.12.2021	near Middleton	624	WSW
AHH5218	1W, M	11.04.2019	Nethybridge, Highland		
Recaptured	Ad, M	21.03.2022	near Heriot	167	SSE
EP45918	1W, M	08.10.2020	Surnadal, More og Romsdal, NORWAY		
Recaptured	Ad, M	21.03.2022	near Heriot	1038	SW
AZL2854	1W, M	16.11.2021	near Heriot		
Recaptured	1W, M	06.03.2022	near Middleton	6	NNE
AJP3546	Ad, M	23.11.2021	near Middleton		
Recaptured	Ad, M	04.04.2022	Peebles	22	SSW
ADT9863	1W, F	18.12.2021	near Middleton		
Recaptured	1W, F	06.04.2022	Peebles	22	SSW
ADT9996	1W, M	06.03.2022	near Middleton		
Recaptured	1W, M	26.03.2022	near Heriot	6	SSW

ratio of juveniles to adults (3.25 : 1) in our study probably reflects the numbers of each age group using the feeding stations, a situation to be expected in post breeding flocks of short-lived passerines.

At Heriot the catching site, in deciduous scrub, is surrounded by upland sheep walks and grouse moor with no obvious alternative food sources nearby. At Middleton the feeding station is also in deciduous scrub but is surrounded by mixed arable and pastoral farmland including an area of game cover crops where alternative food sources may have been available and birds chose to forage there. This difference in surrounding habitats could account for the difference in numbers caught at the two sites. Balmer *et al.* (2013) suggested that patterns of abundance of the Brambling are likely to vary annually according to the size of the autumn influx and the rate at which birds move through the country in search of food. Marsh (2002) suggested that large influxes of the species coincided with those of central Europe, resulting in annual winter numbers in Britain and Ireland varying between 50,000 and two million birds. In an eight-winter study of Bramblings caught in Norfolk, Browne & Mead (2003) found no overall consistent pattern but a significantly higher proportion of males in influx winters.

There were only two interchanges (Table 3) between the sites (6 km apart), each involving a first-winter male; by the end of the winter two birds from Middleton had moved to a feeding station at Peebles. At the time they were caught in Peebles there was no feed available at either of the Moorfoots sites. The four birds ringed prior to the 2021/22 winter give an indication of the source areas of Bramblings visiting southern Scotland and reveal something about their nomadic winter lifestyle. It is interesting to note that EL43728 was still present in southern Norway in mid-winter 2018/19, at a time of high reporting rates of the species in both Britain & Ireland and in Scotland (BTO *et al.* 2022).

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Stuart Bell and Michael Ross for allowing us to operate on their grounds. Prof. Jeremy Greenwood is sincerely thanked for helping to untangle the statistical threads linking our sites and for insightful comments on an earlier draft. We thank the editorial panel for drawing our attention to relevant papers in the literature.

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SOC Annual Conference, Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitlochry, November 2022

Plate 10. Atholl Palace Hotel. © *Atholl Palace Hotel*

November is SOC conference time, and after what seemed like much more than just a couple of years, we were all finally back together in the same room. Well, not quite all, actually; for the first time ever, the SOC conference was available online as well as in person. So thanks to the hard work of the organising team, we made it beyond the Atholl Suite and into studies and living rooms across Scotland and beyond! A few initial technical issues aside, this went very well, and it's just one of the many ways in which SOC is making its activities more accessible. It may have been cold and drizzly outside, but inside the atmosphere was warm as we welcomed around 150 attendees - old and new friends alike. Conference regulars mingled with those who had attended the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme 20th anniversary event on the Friday afternoon, before settling down to a fascinating selection of talks on this year's theme - raptors and raptor conservation.

Plate 11. Alasdair Lemon and Wendy Hicks setting up the tech. © *David Palmar*

The Pitlochry area has some beautiful scenery, the allure of which not even the November weather could diminish. Various field trips took in river valleys and open moorland, with a fine selection of wintry species seen. Dippers graced the River Tummel, finches fed in the forests, and for one lucky group, a Golden Eagle drifted through the murk over Dun Coillich. This felt like a fitting highlight considering the conference theme, and certainly helped keep the cold and wet at bay before lunch on Saturday.

The programme had begun on the Friday evening with a talk by Des Thompson, followed by a lively and entertaining quiz compiled and delivered by Chris Rollie.

Plates 12–13. Chris Rollie conducting the quiz and Des Thompson. © *David Palmar*

Professor Des Thompson FRSE, Principal Advisor on Biodiversity and Science, NatureScot

Raptor conservation in Scotland: a millennium of good deeds, dastardly acts and promise

Des began by taking us back to the start of the millennium and the publication of the DETR/JNCC *Report of the UK Raptor Working Group,* and the eventful conference in Tulliallan Castle on 'Birds of Prey in a Changing Environment'. The report stimulated the formation of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme (SRMS) and paved the way for key work leading to greater protection for raptors, whilst the conference provided a comprehensive overview of raptor conservation and research in Britain and further afield. Moving though ensuing events, the talk covered research and developments in Scotland leading to the publication of the *Werritty Report* on grouse moor management in 2019. Internationally, the formation of the Convention on Migratory Species MoU on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia (known as the Raptor Memorandum of Understanding) had its origins in 2007 at a meeting in Cameron House on the banks of Loch Lomond.

Offering a ring-side seat on unfolding events, and paying tribute to the hundreds of people involved in raptor research and monitoring, the talk brought us up to October 2022 and the Scottish Government's consultation on the Wildlife Management (Grouse) Bill, which proposes a licensing scheme for grouse shooting and increased regulation of muirburn. Looking ahead, Des stressed the vital importance of science and evidence in underpinning proposed land management measures. A lively Q&A followed, reflecting the diversity of perspectives on land management options, but also the desire to keep Scotland leading on raptor conservation actions.

Dr Amy Challis, Scottish Raptor Monitoring Coordinator, BTO Scotland

Following on from Des Thomson's talk the previous evening, Amy opened Saturday's proceedings with a reminder that the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme was launched in 2002, when the original partners met at the Atholl Palace Hotel in Pitlochry to sign a formal agreement. So it was very fitting that we were returning to the same location to mark the 20th anniversary of the Scheme.

One of the key objectives of the SRMS is 'to provide robust information on Scottish raptor populations to determine trends in number, range, survival and productivity, and to understand the causes of population change'. For the anniversary event, we are delighted to be able to publish trends for many SRMS species. This document is a culmination of the efforts of over 800 data contributors. Of the 20 species that the SRMS regularly reports on annually, we have been able to produce trends for 14. To see all the detail of this work, visit: www.raptormonitoring.org/trends

Plates 14–15. Amy Challis and Kez Armstrong. © *David Palmar*

The limited monitoring of some of the more widespread species presents a challenge for the SRMS, hampering our ability to produce even regional trends in breeding numbers for several species such as Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, and Raven. We hope to encourage more people to get involved in raptor monitoring through our *Raptor Patch* initiative, which is particularly targeting these species. To find out more, please visit: www.raptormonitoring.org/getting-involved/raptor-patch

Dr Kez Armstrong, Regional Representative, BTO Northern Ireland

The Common Kestrel in Ireland

In her talk, Kez explored the link between landscape patterns and trophic ecology of the declining avian predator the Kestrel, examining a variety of processes that lead to changes in their ecology and population dynamics. Although the species has an extremely large range (more than 20,000 km^2 across the Palearctic, Afrotropic and Indomalaya), there is increasing evidence that the population is decreasing. Amy had already noted the dearth of Kestrel data in Scotland, and Kez similarly pointed out how the lack of focussed research on the Kestrel in Ireland has seen them fall under the radar there too. A population decline now estimated at around 54% has led to their placement on the Red List of Irish Birds for Conservation Concern. Kez's research results support the theory that the principal driving forces of Irish Kestrel decline are likely to be rapid habitat change leading to prey deficits, persecution, and limited population growth (e.g. the negative effect on breeding performance in nest sites with pasture and urban habitats). These are consistent with previous studies on the causes of decline in Kestrels.

Dr Rob Patchett, Research Fellow, University of St Andrews

Changes in raptor movements in response to altered human activity during COVID-19 lockdowns: a global-scale analysis

Rob opened by reminding us how during the COVID-19 lockdown many animals turned up in strange places (e.g. Feral Goats in urban Llandudno!). Researchers quickly realised that the COVID-19 'anthropause' would afford invaluable insights into human-wildlife interactions, with potentially far-reaching benefits for global wildlife conservation.

The COVID-19 Bio-Logging Initiative, launched in May 2020 by Prof Christian Rutz and colleagues, conducts large-scale collaborative analyses of animal tracking ('bio-logging') data, examining how different species responded to altered levels of human mobility. One sub-project, co-led by Rob, is an ambitious collaboration with the Global Anthropause Raptor Research Network (GARRN) and The Peregrine Fund aiming to understand how lockdowns affected raptor movement patterns around the world.

The international raptor research community has created a remarkable and unprecedented database of tracking data - more than 360 million GPS fixes for over 3,300 tagged raptors across 65 species. Rob acknowledged the sensitive nature of some datasets, and the importance of protecting raptors from persecution. Crucially, all data become aggregated and summarised for analysis, and no location data are shared publicly. Pulling together such data is challenging, but final results are likely to be submitted for publication in 2023.

Once completed, this work will be combined with results from the Initiative's other sub-projects, and from other anthropause studies, as part of a large-scale evidence synthesis exercise. The ultimate goal is to contribute these empirical insights towards boosting global raptor conservation, and improving human-wildlife coexistence more generally. You can find out more about the Initiative from Rob: rbp3@st-andrews.ac.uk, and about this paper: https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-020-1237-z

Katie August, PhD Researcher, NERC Case Partnership, University of Aberdeen

Is there evidence of an ecological trap in a UK population of Northern Goshawks *Accipiter gentilis?*

Katie explained how 'ecological traps' occur when the cues used by individual birds to assess territory quality no longer match reality. With Goshawks, this may come from illegal persecution, imperceptible to the birds that only see a vacant, high-quality territory. To assess whether an ecological trap is present, we need to determine the factors affecting reproduction and survival. Collaborating with raptor workers in the Scottish Borders and Northumberland, Katie found no evidence of an effect of persecution (RSPB) or gamebird release pens (APHA) on reproduction rates. However, she did find an effect of Goshawk nest density, with nests in crowded areas producing on average one less chick than more isolated nests. The survival analysis is ongoing, but Katie has used a range of techniques to gather the individual data required for this. Using camera traps, she set out to get Darvic-ring recoveries. However, fewer than 10% of the individuals photographed were ringed. Therefore, she developed artificial intelligence models to separate Goshawk images from the rest, and to identify individuals. There were varying degrees of success, with the 'Goshawk or not' model reaching accuracies of above 98%, whereas the individual identification model scored 30%, an unusable level. Instead, Katie turned to genetics, using 20 years' worth of moulted feathers from which she identified 301 individuals across 157 sites. Using this unparalleled dataset, she will test the effect of persecution, gamebird release pens, and Goshawk density on individual survival.

Plates 16–17. Rob Patchett and Katie August. © *David Palmar*

Plates 18–19. Ian Johnstone presenting via Zoom and Cat Barlow. © *David Palmar*

Dr Ian Johnstone, Senior Conservation Scientist, RSPB

Cymru Raptor Study Group data shed light on UK Merlin declines

Delivering his talk via Zoom, Ian presented details of a collaborative analysis of Raptor Study Group monitoring data over 25 years. These showed that despite evidence of severe declines in Merlin territory occupation rates across the UK countries, breeding success remained stable. The analysis also uses data on habitat, weather, management, prey, and potential predators around each territory, to test for correlation with territory occupation rates and breeding productivity. Results identify a diverse and surprising range of possible drivers of change, which could inform new work to explore underlying mechanisms of decline and ultimately develop conservation actions to benefit this charismatic falcon.

Dr Cat Barlow, Project Manager, South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project

Cat provided us with an update on the progress of this ambitious project over the last five years. After a series of translocations of both juvenile and subadult Golden Eagles, augmenting the small numbers of young fledging from the isolated and fragmented population in southern Scotland, the population there is now between 35–40 birds. This is higher than at any time in the last 300 years. Despite the challenges of COVID-19 and Avian Influenza, the project has already seen four new territories established, and it now has its first new nest in many years. Hopefully, this is just the beginning of a brighter future for Golden Eagles in southern Scotland.

Shortly after the conference ended came the great news that the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project has been named Scottish project of the year in the National Lottery awards.

Plate 20. Conference audience. © *Steve Willis*

Dr Gaby Peniche, Conservation Biologist

Can raptors make good detectives? If so, what can they tell us about the health of the Scottish Environment?

Golden Eagles again took centre stage when Gaby discussed her work using raptor health to assess the health of the Scottish environment. She discussed the value of community science to her work, and how observations from the Raptor Study Group provided the direction of her work and facilitated her research on live Golden Eagles. She also discussed how community science enabled her to coordinate a monitoring programme to receive raptor carcasses found across Scotland and assess them for cause of death, chemical content, and health prior to death.

Through the examination of both live Golden Eagle chicks and the carcasses of 14 species of Scottish raptor, Gaby's work provided a glimpse into Scottish raptor health. She focused on naturally existing and man-made chemicals that move up the food chain, accumulating in raptors. Concentrations of pesticides, heavy metals, and pharmaceuticals, together with health and post-mortem examinations, provided an understanding of emerging issues in raptors that reflect the health of Scotland's environment. Sublethal levels of rodenticides suggest a role in cause of death, despite only being found at low levels. Lead and mercury concentrations in live Golden Eagle chicks showed an interesting geographical pattern across Scotland. Such findings can act as an early warning of environmental damage and provide an opportunity to address emerging issues. For a fascinating behind-the-scenes look at the release of Golden Eagles into the wild as part of the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project, Gaby suggested visiting: www.youtube.com/watch?v=4V33QqDqueQ

Professor Christian Rutz FRSE, Evolutionary and Behavioural Ecologist, University of St Andrews

Urban-breeding Goshawks in the city of Hamburg, Germany

To conclude the papers delivered at this year's conference, we returned to Goshawks. Christian noted how they typically prefer relatively undisturbed woodland habitats but have started colonising urban environments in Europe and Japan, indicating considerable behavioural plasticity and tolerance of human disturbance. In his talk, he showcased a long-term study of urban-breeding Goshawks in the city of Hamburg, Germany, covering aspects of colonisation dynamics, movement ecology, diet choice, and productivity.

Christian explained how an unusual combination of environmental factors appears to have led to the first pairs settling in Hamburg. Goshawks breed in various types of urban green space, making daring hunting excursions into the concrete jungle. Feral Pigeons are urban

Plates 21–22. Gaby Peniche and Christian Rutz. © *David Palmar*

Goshawks' preferred prey, with surprising effects on their reproductive biology: Goshawk brood sex ratio becomes significantly male-biased as the proportion of pigeons in diet increases; and Goshawks' reproductive performance increases significantly with their selectivity for unusually-coloured pigeons.

Living conditions in Hamburg and other colonised cities generally seem favourable for Goshawks, but populations exhibit elevated mortality rates from collision with windows and the pigeon-transmitted disease trichomonosis.

As Goshawk populations start expanding in parts of Scotland, there are valuable opportunities to conduct research on this enigmatic species. Christian highlighted the benefits of close collaboration across study areas, using standardised monitoring protocols, and outlined the pros and cons of different field methods. Specifically, he shared his experience of conducting systematic nest searches, and emphasised the value of collecting moulted primaries and prey remains.

An improved understanding of the Goshawk's ecological needs, and its response to different types of human disturbance, is key to ensuring its effective protection. Perhaps, one day, Goshawks will breed in and around Scottish towns and cities, providing memorable observations for their human inhabitants. Interested readers can contact Christian directly at: christian.rutz@st-andrews.ac.uk

Plate 23. AGM (L–R) David Lindgren, Ruth Briggs and Rich Kerr. © *David Palmar*

At the AGM, held at the end of Saturday's talks session, the following appointments and re-elections were made: Ruth Briggs (President), Lesley Creamer (Vice-President Management and Infrastructure), David Lindgren (Secretary), Rich Kerr (Treasurer), and Chris Wernham and Hannah Lemon (Elected Council Members). David Lindgren explained the proposed amendment to the Club's Constitution to make provision for online AGMs in future. This amendment was duly adopted by members present. Draft minutes of the meeting will be posted on the SOC website in due course.

After the AGM, the young birders headed off to their programmed networking session, an informal, fun 'speed mentoring' event sponsored by MacArthur Green and ably hosted by Ben Darvill (BTO Scotland). Thanks go to Ben and all the professionals who kindly gave their time to take part, sharing their experiences and careers advice with their enthusiastic young listeners.

Plates 24–25. Young Birders Networking Session. © *Ruth Briggs*

Plate 26. Ceilidh. © *Steve Willis*

Plate 27. Branch Awards; David Parkinson and Malcolm Ross with Ruth Briggs. © *David Palmar*

The rest of Saturday evening was given over to the annual conference dinner and ceilidh. Thanks to the fantastic Alba Ceilidh Band and an enthusiastic audience, there was never a dull moment on the dancefloor!

The Sunday programme ended with the raffle draw (ticket sales raised just over £500 for Club funds) and the presentation of the Branch Recognition Awards by President, Ruth Briggs. This year, there were four members to receive an award for their services to their respective local groups. Borders Branch members David Parkinson and Malcolm Ross (pictured) were at the conference to receive their award. Elizabeth Irwin (Fife) and Peter Swan (Stewartry) were presented with their award via a branch event. Many congratulations to all of this year's recipients.

Whether it was being in the audience gaining new insights from the talks, catching up with old friends and making new ones, or getting out on the field trips, one fantastic aspect of this conference was the very noticeable sea of young faces everywhere you turned. Over 30 young naturalists took up the offer of the subsidised student/recent graduate places that the Club was able to continue to provide, thanks to the generous sponsorship from Swarovski Optik, and the kind support from MacArthur Green and SOC Fife and Lothian branches, as well as donations from individual attendees. Let's hope those young birders were inspired by the talks, benefitted from the wisdom of the more experienced members around them, and find themselves attending many future SOC events. Perhaps they will become the raptor monitors of the future? If an SOC conference can set just one young person on a lifelong journey with Scotland's birds, what a valuable legacy that would be.

Plate 28. SOC members on the Dùn Coillich outing. © *David Palmar*

Plate 29. Loch Tummel outing. © *Steve Willis*

NEWS AND NOTICES

New members

Borders: Mr D. Benson, **Central Scotland:** Dr D. Parkinson, **Clyde:** Mr T. Ambler, Ms A. Beck, Mr I. Graham, Mrs J. Isaac, Mr A. Kelly, Dr P. McGill, Mr B. McKellar & Ms J. Harris, Mr I. McNeill, Mr L. McNulty, Mr D. Ritchie, Ms L. Thirrouez, **Dumfries:** Ms D. Wearn, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr & Mrs S. Cameron, Mr & Mrs E.M. Donovan, **Fife:** Mr R.D. Graham, Miss F. Jefferies, Mr & Mrs J. McCallum, Mrs A. Warner, **Highland:** Miss E. Adam, Mr C. Forsyth, Mr & Mrs A. Grierson, Mr D. Pullan, **Lothian:** Mr A. Baker, Mrs P. Brew Ellis, Mr P. Caldwell, Ms K. Cheung, Mr A.J. Elger, Mr P. Fraser, Mr C. Hind, Mr G. Lamb, Mr E. Meldrum, Mr P. Misselbrook & family, Mrs C .Palmer & family, Mr & Ms V. Ramasawmy, Mr S. Smith, Mr A. Stewart, Dr J. Thompson, Miss L. Valentine, Mr S. Waddoups, Mrs L. Walker, Mrs R. Weaver, Miss S. Whitelaw, **Moray:** Mr P. Bessa, Mr C. Miles, Ms L. Rogers, **North-East Scotland:** Mr J. Adams, Dr F. Bakke, Dr I. Ford, Mr P. Lee, Mrs K. Richards, Mr & Mrs R. Singleton, **Overseas:** Mr D. DeSilvis, **Tayside:** Mr A. Lear

Muriel Draper

Our older Club members will be saddened to learn of the death of Muriel Draper in September 2022, in her 90th year. For many of these years she was a regular attender of Clyde branch meetings, also serving on the branch Committee. Muriel was the wife of past SOC President Dr Ivan Draper, and they regularly attended the annual conferences, where the after-dinner ceilidh was particularly enjoyed by Muriel!

Plate 30. 'Noss Gannets, Shetland'. © *Lisa Hooper*

Waterston House update

Opening hours: Wednesday–Sunday 10:00–16:00 hrs (17:00 hrs from 19 April–24 September). Please check the SOC website for any updates to opening hours and facilities available when planning your visit: www.the-soc.org.uk/about-us/getting-here-opening-hours. Admin staff can be reached Monday to Friday 09:00–17:00 hrs and weekend staff 10:00–16:00 hrs on 01875 871330.

Art exhibitions

Lisa Hooper (SWLA) Showing until 16 April 2023. Lisa lives and works in west Galloway, taking inspiration from the birds and wildlife she sees close to home and on frequent visits to Orkney and Shetland. In this exhibition, she presents a new body of prints, mostly woodcuts and linocuts as well as some etchings.

Lisa's artistic practice was transformed after attending a printmaking course almost three decades ago. Since then, printmaking has become her primary medium. She values the focus that printmaking encourages and she has developed a distinctive style, producing colourful, bold compositions sometimes flirting with abstraction. Lisa is an elected member of the Society of Wildlife Artists. She exhibits widely in the UK and has published two books, *First Impressions* and *Printing Wildlife* with Langford Press, as well as contributing to many publications by Mascot Media such as *The Artful Hare* and *Wings over Water*. SOC members may also remember the poster she was commissioned to produce for The South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project in 2020, and the cover she created for the 2019 *Dumfries and Galloway Bird Report*. Lisa's exhibition at Waterston House is accompanied by glass sculptures by Graham Muir.

Plate 31. Detail from 'Late Afternoon at the Arches'. © *Liz Myhill*

Liz Myhill & Lucy Newton 'Into the Wild' 19 April–4 June 2023. This exhibition brings together the work of Liz Myhill and Lucy Newton. Both artists share a passion for the diversity of the natural world in Scotland. They immerse themselves in nature, painting outdoors from life to better capture their subject but also that particular moment. Their work is full of energy and invention, in turn gentle or raw, detailed or suggestive. They also share a predilection for watercolour as a medium, which they deploy in a contemporary and personal way, often mixing in other media (crayons, charcoal, etc.).

Liz Myhill has a deep-rooted connection to her native Isle of Skye and the Highlands and Islands. Liz works primarily outdoors, while also developing some of her fieldwork into printmaking. This exhibition presents both field paintings and fine art prints such as collagraphs and etchings. Liz studied at Duncan and Jordanstone College of Art in Dundee and has worked as a professional artist since graduating, exhibiting widely across the UK. She was the Swarovski Optik & Birdwatch Magazine Artist of the Year 2021 and was shortlisted for the Highland Art Prize in 2022. She is an elected member of the RSW (Royal Society of painters in Watercolours).

Plate 32. 'Razorbills, Isle of May'. © *Lucy Newton*

Lucy also works primarily in the field. She explains: "I enjoy depicting both the bright, brilliant beauty as well as the more subtle camouflage of our varied wildlife. In order to reflect this diversity, I will often vary my medium, style, and even the pace at which I work, giving a different energy to each piece. My aim is always to try and capture a little fraction of our amazing natural world." After graduating from Edinburgh College of Art, Lucy initially worked as an illustrator, for the *Sunday Herald* in particular, but she now focuses on her own practice. She lives and works in West Lothian.

Art online The SOC Online Art Shop continues to reflect the variety of art that is showcased in the gallery by offering a selection of work by past exhibitors. So, if you have missed recent exhibitions, there is a good chance that you can still experience some of the artwork that was on show by heading online: https://www.the-soc.org.uk/online-shop

Branch updates

New contacts in Clyde - New Bird Recorder: John Simpson, Tel: 07887 883117, Email: clyderecorder@the-soc.org.uk. New Assistant recorder: John Sweeney. He joins long-serving Assistant Recorder, Val Wilson.

The new appointments, made by the SOC Clyde Branch Committee in early December, are for a period of three years. Both John Simpson and John Sweeney are very experienced. John Simpson has been involved with the Clyde branch since the late 1970s and has held various positions on the Committee, including Vice-chair and Chair. He has also served on the SOC Management Committee and on Council too. John was BTO Regional Representative for Strathclyde for a number of years, and is an active member of the Central Scottish Raptor Study Group. A Wildlife Crime Officer for many years, in 2004 John was awarded the accolade of Scotland's Wildlife Crime Officer of the Year. More recently, John has been working as an ecological consultant and leading wildlife tours both in the UK and Europe.

John Sweeney joined the SOC in 1978. During his involvement with the Clyde branch, he has had a couple of spells on the Committee too. An acknowledged expert on bird identification, John has served on the Clyde Bird Records Panel since its inception. He was also a member of the Scottish Birds Records Committee for seven years, and served on the British Birds Rarities Committee for eight years. He is a member of the Central Scotland Raptor Study Group and is also a former bird ringer. He gained a PhD in 1998 for a study on the behavioural ecology of breeding Wrens.

2022 SOC Branch Recognition Awards

Council launched these awards in 2014 as a way of the Club recognising members' contributions to their local group. The awards are presented during a dedicated slot at the Annual Conference. The 2022 awardees were David Parkinson and Malcolm Ross (Borders), who received their awards at the conference (see p39), and Elizabeth Irwin (Fife) and Peter Swan (Stewartry), who were presented with their certificates at a branch outing and indoor meeting respectively.

There was a good turnout at Stewartry's programmed November indoor meeting, where long-serving Branch Secretary Joan Howie presented Peter Swan with his Branch Recognition Award along with a copy of the book *There and Back : A Celebration of Bird Migration* (a coincidental tie-in with the theme

Plate 33. Elizabeth Irwin (right) is presented with her award by fellow Fife Branch Committee member Caroline Gordon during the branch outing to Largo Bay, 13 November 2022. © *John Irwin*

Plate 34. Margaret and Peter Swan on Islay with Jura in background, 8 October 2008. © *Joan Howie*

of the evening's talk by BTO Scotland's Mark Wilson). As well as the award citation, Joan read out several messages of congratulations from members who were unable to attend.

SOC Fellowships

Council is delighted to announce the creation of SOC fellowships. The award of 'SOC Fellow' replaces previous categories of honorary membership and is designed to recognise an individual's outstanding contribution to the Club's objectives, as described in our Constitution. One award will be available every year in each of three categories. Awards need not be restricted to SOC members.

The categories against which nominations will be determined are: contributions over an extended period to the scientific study of birds; contributions to the aesthetic and artistic appreciation of birds and wildlife; and contributions to service and citizenship in advancing and promoting the Club's interests, including training and education.

Nominations are confidential and can be made by any SOC member. The procedure includes completion of a standard form, support from at least three other members, and short written statements. Nominations will be considered by office bearers of the Club, with input, if required, from recent past Presidents and Council's Appointments Panel. Proposals must be approved by Council and any awards will be made at the AGM. Submissions should be made by 31 May for determination in time for the same year's AGM.

The SOC Fellowship award is primarily one of recognition, without defined financial benefits. It is hoped that the accolade itself can be received and promoted with pride by Fellows and their peers.

More details and nomination forms are available on the SOC website. Completed nominations should be submitted to the Club Administrator by Email: mail@the-soc.org.uk. Postal submissions can be marked for the private attention of Wendy Hicks and sent to Waterston House, Aberlady EH32 0PY.

The SOC Archives - an official treasure trove!

To celebrate its 20th anniversary, the Scottish Council on Archives (SCA) invited Scottish organisations that hold archive material to nominate one item from their collection. These items, which were to have an interesting story to tell, had to be of local or national significance, and would form a digital exhibition of 'Twenty Treasures' reflective of Scotland's rich cultural and social history.

From the SOC Archives, Librarian Rosie Filipiak took the initiative to nominate a 'Schedule for Observations on Birds' completed at Pentland Skerries Lighthouse on Muckle Skerry, between the Scottish mainland and Orkney, by lighthouse keeper John Bain in 1911. This item was put forward for the following reasons:

- These Schedules are around 100 years old now so have considerable historical value
- Schedules were completed at sites along the coastlines of Britain and Ireland so have a national and international significance
- They were completed by the keepers of the many lighthouses and lightships around our coastline and islands; automation of the lights ended the need for resident keepers
- This was a large-scale survey carried out over many decades generating a vast amount of data, which hugely progressed the knowledge and understanding of bird migration
- The data recording, and the collation of that data, was done on a voluntary basis; similarly, funding for the project came from philanthropic donors

We were, therefore, thrilled to be notified in October that the SCA selection panel had chosen this Schedule to be included as one of its 'Twenty Treasures'. In selecting the Schedule, the SCA panel commented: *"We were delighted to receive a nomination that so wonderfully showcases the importance of archives to the study of the natural world!"* (https://tinyurl.com/52jz8pyk).

This Schedule is part of the Bird Migration Survey carried out in the early 20th century. The printed forms recording bird species and numbers seen by observers at coastal stations were initially sent to William Eagle Clarke,

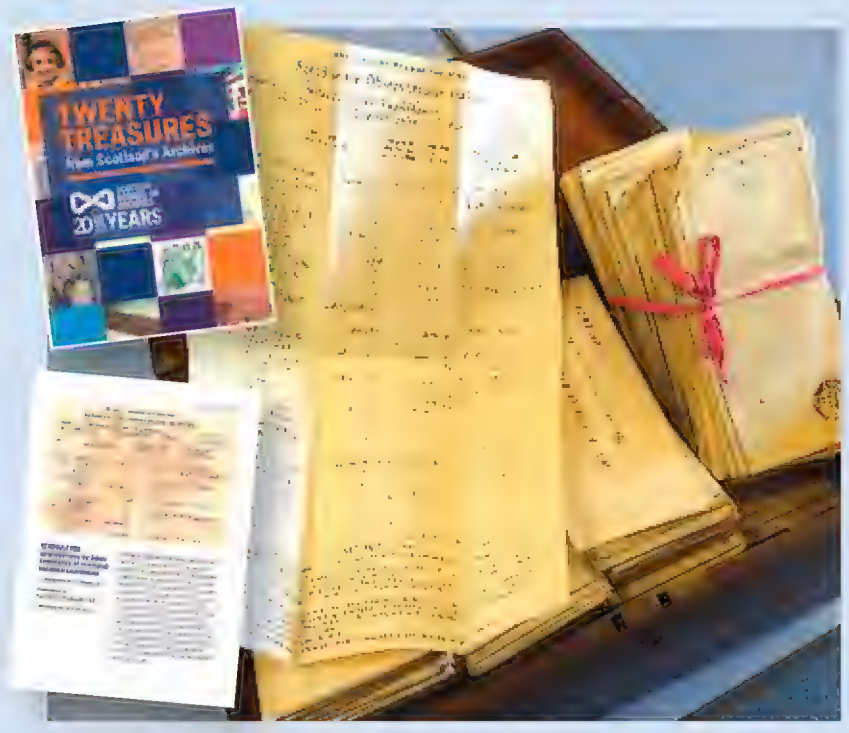

Plate 35. Box of Schedules showing the nominated item laid on top. **Insets.** Front cover and SOC entry in the SCA Twenty Treasures booklet.

keeper of Natural History at the Royal Museum of Scotland, and later to Leonora Rintoul and Evelyn Baxter. This has resulted in both the SOC and the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh holding a considerable number of these Schedules.

The data collected, collated, and analysed from these Schedules added considerably to what was known of bird migration at the time. William Eagle Clarke's *Studies in Bird Migration* Volumes I and II were published in 1912 using data from the earliest years of the Survey.

Sometime around 1910, Evelyn Baxter and Leonora Rintoul took over receipt of the Scottish Schedules and the preparation of the reports for publication. In 1918, they published a paper in the journal *Ibis* challenging the accepted understanding of fixed routes for bird migration and introducing the idea of drift migration in response to wind direction. These Schedules also informed their publication *The Birds of Scotland* (1953) which was the first comprehensive work on Scottish birds.

There is a podcast giving the full, fascinating history of the Schedules and the Lighthouse Report that started it all at: https://tinyurl.com/mr273c29, and podcasts of all Twenty Treasures were posted on the SCA Twitter account through November and December.

The Chair and trustees of the Scottish Council on Archives held a small reception to celebrate their 20th Anniversary at the Scottish Parliament on 23 November 2022. There, the Schedule was on view alongside the nineteen other Treasures, all of which are also featured in a printed booklet. The Twenty Treasures digital exhibition can be viewed at http://bit.ly/TwentyTr.

For details of all that the SOC Archives hold, click here: https://bit.ly/SOCArchives.

SOC Council thanks Rosie and Library Committee members Alan Knox (Chair) and Bob McGowan for their part in the Schedule gaining this public recognition.

Bird blowfly: appeal for maggot sightings!

The Bird Blowfly *Protocalliphora azurea* is a parasite whose maggots feed on the blood of a wide variety of nestling birds. The fly is either rare, or under-recorded in Scotland, but it is regularly found in Ross-shire so is likely to occur elsewhere. The larvae will most likely be found by ornithologists examining occupied nests of birds. The maggots look like those of other blowflies which you might also find in nests, but tend to be darker in colour due to their blood diet. Samples of any maggots found in nests would be interesting to see. These can be preserved in alcohol - ethanol is preferable, but methylated spirits (or even gin!) will serve. Any pupae found in nests can be kept in a closed container to await the emergence of the adults. If you have found maggots feeding on live chicks, please contact Murdo Macdonald records@hbrg.org.uk with details.

The birds of North Rona and Sula Sgeir

As a special, digital-only supplement to this edition of *Scottish Birds* we are delighted to publish *The birds of North Rona and Sula Sgeir* by Stuart Murray, Mike P. Harris and Sarah Wanless. These remote, now uninhabited islands lying 70 km north of the Butt of Lewis are named respectively after the Grey Seal colonies on North Rona and the Gannet colony on Sula Sgeir. In this richly-illustrated 50-page

study, the authors deal extensively with the human and ornithological history of both islands before presenting annotated check lists of the birds nesting and recorded there on passage. Their findings conclude with a comprehensive bibliography.

SOC members can access their free copy of the publication via the *Scottish Birds* Online portal: sbonline.the-soc.org.uk/login

Latest local bird reports

Ayrshire Bird Report 2018

This is now available, free to download, online at www.ayrshire-birding.org.uk. Including an annual summary of Tom Byars' Ayrshire Lesser Whitethroat study, the report also features a full systematic list and a wide range of photographs taken within Ayrshire during 2018. This report forms part of an effort to catch up with our annual bird reports, and work will begin on the 2019 report soon.

Lothian Bird Report 2020

Published in December, is available priced at £10 (plus p&p). The 158-page report is packed with information and colour photos, with details given for every species recorded in 2020, together with summaries for every species ever seen in Lothian. There are also articles on the birds of Blackness Bay, a North Berwick House Martin survey, and the annual Mute Swan census.

Copies can be purchased in person from Waterston House, Aberlady, or from The Viking Optical Centre, 101 Rose Street, Edinburgh, although please check availability before travelling.

For details of how to place a postal order for the 2020 report or back issues, please Email Stephen Hunter: stephen.lsoc@btinternet.com or visit the SOC website (Bird Recording/Bird Reports and Atlases).

Borders Bird Report 2021

The latest report, No. 38, is available to download in digital format (in return for a small donation) from the SOC website, under the Bird Recording tab (select Bird Reports and Atlases). Printed copies are available from Malcolm Ross, 24 Netherbank, Galashiels, TD1 3DH priced at £13 (plus £2 p&p). Cheques should be made payable to 'SOC Borders Branch'. Please Email eliseandmalcolm@btinternet.com in the first instance, to check availability. Copies are also available to purchase in person from Waterston House.

The report covers 219 species seen in Borders in 2021, with a returning Lesser Scaup, an inland singing Icterine Warbler and a long-staying Rose-coloured Starling among the highlights. 260 pages long, it also includes summaries from raptor surveys, seabird monitoring at St Abb's Head, and ringing activities during the year.

The report is illustrated with colour photographs taken by local birders and is generously supported by graphs depicting trends of species records in recent years, as well as tetrad maps for selected species.

Letter to the editors

The author of 'Osprey taking Little Grebe' (*Scottish Birds*, Vol 42(4), p. 328) might be interested to know that in the Wallace Collection in London there is a large painting of an Osprey taking a Mallard. I don't recall the artist but, it being the Wallace Collection, it is probably an eighteenth-century French or Dutch painting. At the time I noticed it, I assumed the artist had staged the scene and painted the birds from stuffed specimens. However, in the light of Fergus Cumberland's report, perhaps it is an early example of a wildlife artist working in the field...

Neil Stratton (SOC Borders)

Editorial note: *the work Neil probably refers to is entitled 'Hawk attacking a Wild Duck', painted around 1737–47. It is attributed to Jacques-Charles Oudry (1722–1778). The editor recalls watching an Osprey successfully take a Dunlin at Hammonnasset Beach State Park in Connecticut in February 1988.*

OBITUARIES

Iain Paton Gibson (1951–2022)

Plate 36. Dr Hector Galbraith, Iain Gibson, and George White at Hogganfield Loch 2012. © *B. Zonfrillo*

Iain was born on 11 May 1951 in Paisley, Renfrewshire. He grew up in the town, but later moved to the outskirts and closer to his favourite 'patch' Paisley Moss - a site he continually visited, even in recent years. There he developed an interest in migrant waders such as Green Sandpiper, Jack Snipe, and Wood Sandpiper, the latter a species he claimed as his 'favourite bird'. A healthy number of species was added to the Moss's list. It was at the Moss around 1963 where he first met two life-long friends: Hector Galbraith and George White, who helped boost his local knowledge and record new species. As an eleven-year-old, Iain kept detailed notebooks on everything seen at Paisley Moss and was further encouraged when he won a Paisley Museum Natural History Society Prize for his 'Nature Notebooks' on the Moss. In 1963, he also met up with Ronnie Jeffrey (who notably had a car!) and others. His membership of the Scottish Ornithologists Club introduced yet more enthusiasts and friends like BZ and Tommy Daniels. Visits to the east coast were mini-expeditions at weekends, but large people in a Volkswagen proved a little claustrophobic. The local patch was thereafter considered more important! Iain also met his partner Alison Beck while working as Countryside Rangers at Muirshiel Country Park, and there began a relationship lasting almost 50 years. As a talented Art School Graduate, Alison was often roped in to help illustrate Clyde Bird Reports, an endeavour Iain was responsible for inaugurating and developing to the present high standards.

Like many of his age, Iain developed a keen interest in politics, and in social justice. And like many he also detested the destruction of wildlife by the hunting and shooting fraternity. He was never slow in denouncing such, often criminal, activity. In his later working days, he joined Glasgow City Council, in the then Parks and Recreation Department. This proved extremely fortuitous. He was able to thus raise the status of places such as Hogganfield Loch from a boating pond, and nearby Robroyston Marsh, which he created, to that of Local Nature Reserves. He and his dedicated team of six made a big difference to local conservation in the Glasgow area. The benefits are still visible to visitors who can now see and photograph

species such as Whooper Swan, Goosander and Gadwall and many other waterfowl, all at close range at Hogganfield. In other areas, he converted lifeless 'duck ponds' with addition of suitable vegetation, into breeding areas for grebes and other waterfowl. Iain was an honorary member of the Scottish Ornithologists Club, an accolade he cherished and deserved. In 2010, he had become the longest serving SOC Local Recorder and was Local Recorder for the entire Clyde Region from 1975, being also Editor of the Clyde Bird Report from 1975, and produced the annual journal *Clyde Birds*, a huge collaborative effort, with Val Wilson, from 1990. He served on several committees in Glasgow and Edinburgh, contributing to and shaping policies on ornithology in Scotland. In what spare time he had, he surveyed the heather moors of Muirshiel Regional Park for its Hen Harriers and unfortunately documented the decline of 11 pairs to zero at present. During that time, over 40 chicks were ringed. For Iain's sake, an effort should be made to repopulate this area. Sadly, after a lengthy period of ill health, it finally took its toll on 16 October 2022. He is survived by Alison and his sister Sheila.

B. Zonfrillo

David Jenkins (1926–2022)

David, a highly regarded ecologist and wildlife conservationist, wanted to be a naturalist from boyhood. He was fortunate to have parents who encouraged his interests and ensured he had an excellent education. From preparatory school in Birmingham he was awarded a Foundation Scholarship to Marlborough College. He went on to study veterinary medicine at the Royal Veterinary College, Camden, and practised briefly before entering Cambridge University to read Zoology. Subsequently, he joined the Oxford University Bureau of Animal Population for a D.Phil, studying Grey Partridges at Fordingbridge in Hampshire. He never looked back.

After completing his doctorate, he began a study of Red Grouse, financed initially by the Scottish Landowners Federation (SLF), under the direction of Professor V.C. Wynne-Edwards of Aberdeen University. The broad aim was to assess why Red Grouse numbers were declining. Field work was started in Glen Esk (Angus) in 1956. He was soon joined by zoologist Adam Watson (Aberdeen University), and by botanist Gordon Miller (Newcastle University). I was appointed as an assistant from University College London in the icy winter of 1962–63 to the by now core of the Unit of Grouse and Moorland Ecology, when a new study area was being established on a grouse moor on the flank of Kerloch at the northern edge of the Glen Dye estate near Banchory, Aberdeenshire. Very soon after meeting David, he said I should join the Scottish Ornithologists' Club; I have been a member ever since. David introduced me to George Waterston, a gracious gentleman, a founder member of the club, and Irene, his wife.

Plate 37. David Jenkins at home in Aboyne, North-East Scotland, 2003. © *Harry Scott*

The Grouse Unit was first housed in the converted stables of a demolished mansion at Blackhall near Banchory. Under David's direction, and thanks to 'Wynne', the work was financed by the Nature Conservancy when the initial SLF funding ended: the Red Grouse was deemed ideal for developing Wynne's ideas on population dynamics. The unit soon expanded, and Robert Moss, a biochemist from UCL, was taken on to study aspects of grouse nutrition and co-supervised by David for a Ph.D. On its completion, he was recruited to the staff. Later developments, and the move to a new site on the outskirts of Banchory at the Hill of Brathens, are best followed in David's substantial, very honest, and most readable autobiography *Of Partridges & Peacocks - and of things about which I knew nothing. A life in wildlife ecology and wildlife management* (2003). He organised symposia there for the NERC on 'Trees and Wildlife in the Scottish Uplands', 'The Biology and Management of the River Dee', 'Agriculture and the Environment', and with 'Willie' Shearer (Freshwater Fisheries Station, Montrose), 'The Status of the Atlantic Salmon in Scotland'. All were edited to David's demanding standards. His wide-ranging knowledge and organisational skill put the World Pheasant Association, which he later advised, particularly on Asiatic species, and the proceedings of their international conferences on gamebirds, on a highly regarded scientific footing.

David moved to Edinburgh in 1966 and was appointed Assistant Director (Research) Scotland to take charge of all Nature Conservancy research in Scotland. He studied Shelduck in Aberlady Bay as a personal project while there. He returned to Banchory in 1972, as director of the new NERC Institute of Terrestrial Ecology research station at Brathens. There he began a study locally of Otters, continued by the appointment of Hans Kruuk. In his spare time (!) David recorded the dates when birds started singing in spring, and the timing of leaf burst and flowering of trees and herbs. Publications from these observations stretching back over five decades have highlighted the dramatic effects that climate change is having on the phenology of plants and animals. He also published on avian predators of grouse, the distribution of Foxes and Wildcats in Scotland, and the birds of mid-Deeside. During his time as Director, Brathens became an internationally renowned research institute not only for work in the uplands, but also on Scotland's seabirds following his appointment of Mike Harris to work on Puffins. David was awarded an Honorary Professorship at Aberdeen University in 1986, a D.Sc. in Oxford, and Fellowship of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. He retained links with Aberdeen University through his close friendship with Professor George Dunnet, director of the University field station (Culterty) at Newburgh, Aberdeenshire.

Countless people are indebted to David for his ideas, guidance, and editing skills, particularly his advice 'not to baffle the reader with science'. He travelled widely, led overseas tours, and encouraged many aspiring biologists at home and abroad. He and his wife Margaret were fine hosts to many visitors. He greatly enjoyed the social life of his home village of Aboyne in mid-Deeside and rather to his surprise, but delight, was a Chairman of the Strathdee Music Club. He regularly attended the SOC annual conferences, and generously contributed raffle prizes to NE SOC Branch for their funds.

Latterly, his sight and mobility deteriorated, but to the end he never lost his critical faculties and remained passionately interested in all aspects of Scottish ornithology. He died at 96 in the Aberdeen Royal Infirmary on 1 December 2022.

He is survived by Margaret, his wife of 61 years, and children Fenella and Gavin.

N. Picozzi (with help from David's family, friends, and former colleagues).

Muirburn - still a hot topic

In November 2020, virtually a year on from publication of the *Werritty Report* on grouse moor management, the environment minister Mairi Gougeon stated that in future muirburn would only be permitted under licence, and with very few exceptions there would be a statutory ban on burning on peatland. On 26 October 2022, the Scottish Government finally opened a public consultation on its plans to implement the *Werritty Report*.

Meanwhile, vast areas of heather, grass, and gorse are still set alight in Scotland between 1 October and 30 April, with landowners and managers supposedly guided by the voluntary 'Muirburn Code'. A revised version of this was launched in September 2017, specifically to address the issue of fire management. Although the Code purports to be wildlife-friendly, any burning in April is potentially destructive. By that date, many moorland birds, including waders, raptors, and indeed grouse, will be on their breeding territory and may already have eggs. Sadly, there is evidence aplenty that the Code is widely breached both by the grouse-shooting industry and by shepherds. Some recent photographs from a driven grouse moor within the Moorfoot Hills Special Area of Conservation (and also an SSSI) provide telling evidence of this.

Even before these pictures were taken, the latest assessment was that the dry heaths in this Borders SAC were in an unfavourable condition, with burning being one of the pressures (https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/8326). A yet more blatant example of reckless muirburn occurred in Glenrath, Borders in April 2017. Here, an entire scree slope was burnt out by a shepherd, leaving the bare rock exposed. Six years later, vegetation on the hill has still not recovered, and possibly never will.

It is a widely accepted that unless and until muirburn is rigorously regulated, the Scottish Government risks failing to meet its climate change targets. With this in mind, the RSPB has launched an App enabling you to use your smartphone to report any burns you encounter via its Upland Burning Survey form: https://upland-burning-rspb.hub.arcgis.com. So, when out birding or walking in the hills this

Plates 38–39. Burning on steep slopes and into steep woodland, Moorfoot SAC, Borders, 2022.
© *Andrew Barker*

Plate 40. Glenrath, Borders, 2017. © *Ian Poxton*

spring, should you encounter any managed fires (active, smouldering, or recent) please add your data to this important survey. As much information as possible is needed to help protect such vital carbon stores. Remember, though, to bear your own safety in mind, and if you reckon a fire is burning out of control, call 999 to request emergency assistance.

Andrew Barker, Lasswade, Midlothian.

SOC Lothian Branch hosts junior goosewatch

Plate 41. Down at Kilspindie © *Rosie Filipiak*

On Saturday 5 November 2022, volunteers from Lothian Branch hosted a Junior Goosewatch event, welcoming twelve budding naturalists along to enjoy one of Scotland's greatest birding spectacles: the sight of hundreds of Pink-footed Geese touching down to roost.

Thankfully, it was a dry and clear night, and there was lots of chat all round as everyone made their way down to the Kilspindie side of Aberlady Bay. The tide was well out, but there were plenty birds to see; Black-headed Gull, Wigeon, Shelduck, Oystercatcher and Curlew were spotted, and the bright white of a Little Egret also caught the eye as the daylight slowly faded.

Several skeins of Pink-footed Geese flew in from the east and demonstrated their 'whiffling', twisting descents to lose speed and height before finally settling down way out at the shoreline. All this activity generated lots of questions from the young people which kept the four volunteers on their toes.

As darkness deepened, and with the moon shining brightly above, the group turned their 'scopes upwards, to the moon and the nearby planet, Jupiter with four of its moons on show. Then, as everyone prepared to head back to Waterston House, "wink, wink", "wink, wink" came from above, and a huge number of Pink-footed Geese, in several very large skeins, flew right over everyone's heads from the south and out to roost in the bay.

Back at the Centre, the group warmed up with a hot chocolate before settling in for a short presentation from Aberlady Bay Reserve Warden (and volunteer), John Harrison.

Thank you to all the young people and their accompanying parent/guardian who joined us on Saturday, and especially to Lothian SOC volunteers Rosie, Emma, Andrew and John.

Thanks to the support of a generous donor, the Branch were able to offer this exciting experience for young people free of charge.

To receive details of upcoming young person events organised by the Club and our partners in Scotland, please join our mailing list, here: http://eepurl.com/hFDYg5

Rosie Filipiak

Leave a living legacy

My journey with the SOC began in 2017, when I was awarded a place on the Isle of May-based, Young Birders' Training Course (YBTC). I had first heard about the YBTC via an email circulated around Aberdeen University while I was studying for a BSc in Zoology. YBTC offered an insight into practical ornithological research and the daily life of managing an island nature reserve. It was the first building block of the practical skills, ornithological knowledge, and peer network that I would build upon during the last five years of my involvement with the Club.

It was when I moved to Glasgow and attended my first SOC Clyde Branch meeting that I was presented with further opportunities to become involved in projects such as the Black-headed Gull Count. Now, three years on, my gull identification and general survey skills have improved, and it's a delight to return to watching the gulls in my local area each winter, especially on a crisp but sunny winter morning. I'll quite often catch the Cormorants and Goosander that gather at Glasgow Science Centre, with the odd Goldeneye, Little Grebe or Common Seal if I'm lucky.

Zul Bhatia, Chairman of the Clyde Branch, encouraged me to join SOC Youth Connect, through which I met other young birders. I was also persuaded to join the Clyde Branch Committee, through which I have participated in small group projects, including writing species accounts for the Local Bird Reports and helping to build the Clyde Branch website. I was also fortunate to attend the fantastic Volunteer Seabirds at Sea (VSAS) training course provided by the SOC and Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) in 2021, and now regularly carry out VSAS surveys between Ardrossan and Arran.

The real benefit to being a member of the SOC is the various opportunities to take part in courses, conferences and projects and to meet so many enthusiastic and knowledgeable people. It was a pleasure to catch up with members I'd met on past courses and projects at the recent SOC Annual Conference. Myself and Ally Lemon, who I'd met on the YBTC in 2017, were pleased to see so many new 'young birders' at the event, which is a reflection of how effective and positively received the SOC's efforts to attract young people into the Club in recent years has been.

My time as a young birder is swiftly coming to an end, but I'm very much looking forward to giving back to the SOC for the opportunities it's given me, and plan to become involved in further projects and will continue to make life-long connections.

Emma Anderson

Leaving a legacy to the SOC is a great way to help the Club nurture the next generation of bird conservationists and allows us to create more opportunities for young people to connect with birds, and with one another.

Find out more today www.the-soc.org.uk/support-us/leave-a-legacy

Coal Tit robs Red Squirrel

In early December 2022, I was walking at Loch an Eilein, near Aviemore, when I noticed a Red Squirrel on top of a feeder box - it took out a nut and started nibbling. A Coal Tit then appeared and began hovering directly in front of the squirrel, fluttering in and away again, reaching its feet towards the nut and causing the squirrel to drop it. With the next nut, the tit perched just below the squirrel and stared up. The squirrel seemed wary, but continued eating. The Coal Tit then flew up and hovered again, so close that its beak was touching the nut at the squirrel's mouth. This time the squirrel held on to the nut and, after a few moments of watching, the tit flew off. Sadly, the light was poor so the photos are not the best, but it was very exciting to witness such an unexpected example of kleptoparasitism.

Caroline Smith, Edinburgh.

Plates 42–44. Coal Tit and Red Squirrel, Loch an Eilein, Highland, 2 December 2022. © *Caroline Smith*

BOOK REVIEWS

The book reviews published in *Scottish Birds* reflect the views of the named reviewers and not those of the SOC.

Australian Bird Guide (concise edition)

Jeff Davies, Peter Menkhorst, Danny Rogers, Rohan Clarke, Peter Marsack, Kim Franklin, 2022. Christopher Helm, London. ISBN: TPB 978-1-3994-0629-1. Flexibound, 252 pages, colour illustrations, colour distribution maps, £24.99.

In a crowded field, the best guide to the many birds of Australia is *The Australian Bird Guide* (*ABG*; Menkhorst, 2017) which covers every regularly occurring species in the country (over 900), including subspecies and rarities. The quality of the text and especially the illustrations far exceeds that of the other guides, but at 1.46 kg it is rather heavy for an international traveller heading to Australia.

So, I wondered how this 400 g concise edition could cover the huge variety of species and compete with the excellent *ABG*. Easy! It is based on the *ABG* and although it covers slightly fewer species (still over 700), maximises the use of space.

Each species has high quality, accurate illustrations of plumage variations, a distribution map and a symbol indicating how likely one is to see the species within its range. The concise species text contains the key identification features, and the voice is described. Introductory pages are as brief as they can be – just seven pages – and there is an alphabetical index to bird groups and an index of species.

Anyone interested in the birds of Australia should get the full guide, but if you are just visiting, leave that at home and buy this excellent complementary concise guide to take with you! I really can't recommend it highly enough.

Mark Holling

Birds of South Africa

Helm Wildlife Guides. Adam Riley. 2022. Helm, London, ISBN: 978-1-4729-9080-8 224 pages, colour photos, one colour map, softback, £16.99.

My first impressions were certainly favourable. As an attractive photo-guide to *c.* 340 bird species commonly encountered in South Africa, this is suitably pocket-sized, weighing only 390 g. The images, all taken by the author, are generally excellent. Where differences exist, both male, female and often juvenile plumages are usually included. The very concise descriptive text accompanying each species includes information on resident or migratory status, identification, song/calls, behaviour, habitats and distribution. The first 17 pages contain sections on habitats and endemism, including a useful map, and a description of 19 of the best birding sites in the country. The rest of the book contains the species accounts with photos, a short final section on further reading, resources, and an index of species (English names only).

My main criticism is that there are no distribution maps - a major drawback in a country with such diverse habitats (there are details in the text, but these are not visually accessible). Further, that many species are omitted, especially seabirds, and only the birds of South Africa itself are covered; those of the six neighbouring and surrounded countries of Southern Africa are largely omitted.

Without doubt, this book will be compared with the SASOL *Birds of Southern Africa* which has been the standard field guide (first published in 1993) and is currently in its fifth edition (2020). It is heavier (my fourth edition weighs 865 g) but covers almost 1,000 birds likely to be encountered in the whole of the geographical

region of Southern Africa, from Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique to the Cape. I have found it indispensable on my six birding trips to Southern Africa and, depending where purchased, is cheaper than the photo guide.

In summary, this compact guide is an attractive book that will appeal to the traveller with a general interest in the birds most likely to be seen in the region. However, the more serious birder will be much better off with the latest SASOL Guide and/or the accompanying smart phone app.

Ian Poxton

Short-eared Owls
Bryan Benn, 2021. Privately published, hardback. ISBN 978-1-8384800-0-4. 432 pages, numerous illustrations. £30.00 + £5 postage. To purchase, Email Bryan at Yeti.in.kent@gmail.com

When driving up the single-track road to watch the Hen Harriers at Langholm, you might often have found someone actually watching another species, the Short-eared Owl. This was Bryan, having driven all the way from Kent, either staying in B&Bs or sleeping in his car depending on the weather and what the owls were doing. He has spent a decade so far mapping their movements, listening to their calls, and in fact studying their full lifestyle from breeding to migration in over 60 locations around Britain. The two main locations covered are the Elmley Marshes in Kent for studies in winter, and the Langholm estate in Scotland in summer. He also searched for their distinctive pellets to ascertain diet. From all this coverage, he has written the first detailed monograph to be published about the Short-eared Owl in the UK - and what a book it is. He took the majority of the many excellent, relevant photographs including close-ups, habitats and more which illustrate the book.

Langholm can hardly be beaten for the number of Short-eared Owls: the highest count (in a 'vole year') was 42 pairs. Bryan intends to continue his study, so perhaps there will be a further volume sometime in the future. In the meantime, I am quite sure you will enjoy this excellent, dedicated, and enthusiastic ten-year study of a surprisingly little-understood species.

John Miles

New Books also received in the George Waterston Library

Shrikes of the World. Norbert Lefranc, 2022. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. ISBN 978-1-4729-3377-5, hardback, 336 pages, £60.00.

Birds of Borneo. Susan Myers, 2023. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. ISBN 978-1-4729-8690-0, paperback, 224 pages, £16.99.

Birds of Colombia. Otto Pfister, 2023. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. ISBN 978-1-4729-8467-8, paperback, 224 pages, £16.99.

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RINGERS' ROUNDUP

Thank you very much to the many ringers, ringing groups, birders and the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) who provided the information for this latest round up. Thanks also to the many bird watchers and folk who take the time and trouble to read rings in the field or find dead ringed birds and report them.

If you have any interesting ringing recoveries, articles, wee stories, project updates or requests for information which you would like to be included in the next issue, please email to Raymond Duncan at rduncan393@outlook.com.

For lots more exciting facts, figures, numbers and movements log on to http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/ringing/publications/online-ringing-reports.

Update on the effects of the fire in Tay Reedbeds in April 2020

A huge fire burned large areas of the Tay Reedbeds on 27 April 2020; this involved approximately 50% of the best areas for breeding birds. Two Marsh Harrier nests were burned out and many Bearded Tits and Water Rail nests were lost. Amazingly at least some of the first broods of Bearded Tits managed to escape the fire, and were seen feeding in the area the following day.

Despite the fire damage, the long term effects appear to have greatly improved the habitat, by removing areas of old reed. This allowed the RSPB, who lease much of the reedbeds, to extend the areas managed. This has resulted in a large increase in the number of breeding Water Rails, which will be fully assessed when the three year study is completed later this year.

Tay Ringing Group have for many years monitored the breeding population of Bearded Tits as part of the BTO's Re-trapping Adults for Survival (RAS) Survey. We mist net at four sites from March to September. The numbers trapped at the most easterly site had been decreasing, probably due to changes in the areas managed, so it was decided that in 2022 we would abandon that site and use a new site near the most westerly site. The new site had been used for catching Beardies in the autumn and winter but had rarely been used during the breeding season.

During our RAS visits we catch many birds which are not specifically targeted, but all are ringed and processed. The data are passed to the RSPB which allows them to assess the results of their management and to make any changes necessary to keep the habitat in prime condition for breeding birds. Whilst it is not possible to detail the changes in all of the species using the reedbeds, it is possible to briefly look at the changes in numbers of two of the breeding species over the past five years.

Bearded Tit

Since first being recorded on the Tay in the early 1990s the numbers of birds trapped has varied widely, with irregular peaks and troughs, but the numbers had steadily increased and I have no doubt that they have benefited greatly from the management of the RSPB. I have looked at the data for the period 2018 to 2022 as I feel that gives a good enough indication of the situation. The numbers were obviously badly affected by the pandemic in 2020 when we were unable to ring for much of the breeding season, and the aforementioned fire. To compensate for this we carried out additional sessions after the RAS period and this continued in 2021 and 2022.

Table 1. Shows the number of new birds ringed and the total number of captures that year.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
New Birds	424	259	221	607	1000
Total Captures	581	354	345	915	1846

Clearly 2022 was an exceptional year for Bearded Tits and provided our best ever catch on 21 October, when there were 217 captures between two of our sites.

It is not possible to say at this stage exactly what the breeding population is, as the data are

still being analysed. It has been indicated to me that the minimum number of pairs present in 2022 was 164, but it is likely that there were in excess of 200 breeding pairs, and possibly as many as 529 adults present during the breeding season. I think I can safely say that the population remains high as the yearly total of 1,000 new birds suggests.

Reed Warbler

In 1985 Tay Ringing Group caught six Reed Warblers which was our best ever year. It is almost certain that all of these birds were migrants as they were caught between July and September. Since then numbers caught each year have steadily increased and breeding was proved a number of years ago when sexually active adults and newly fledged juveniles were caught. Reed Warblers do not usually arrive on the Tay till May, so no nests would have been lost due to the fire in 2020, although breeding habitat would have been reduced that year.

Table 2. Shows the number of new birds ringed and the total number of captures that year.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
New Birds	70	101	130	196	241
Total Captures	80	116	141	226	270

Over the past five years the numbers of both new birds ringed and captured have greatly increased while effort has remained fairly constant except for 2020, due to COVID-19 restrictions. Clearly the number of breeding pairs is increasing and probably the numbers of migrants too, as birds have been caught as late as 18 October. The reasons for the dramatic increase are no doubt complex, but climate change will be partly responsible. It may also be that the changes in management have benefited them.

Steve Moyes

Interesting ringing movements

Chk = chick, Juv = juvenile, Im = Immature, Ad = adult, Unk = unknown, M = male, F =female, Sghtd = ring(s) read in field, Rtpd = retrapped, n = nesting, x = dead

First sighting of a Scottish-breeding Common Sandpiper on its wintering grounds in Guinea-bissau

On 27 February 2020 João Belo, a Portugese researcher, was working in the Bijagos Archipelago, mapping important intertidal habitats for shorebirds. The archipelago is a large wetland comprising islands, mudflats and mangroves off the coast of Guinea-Bissau, West Africa. As well as noticing

Plate 45. Common Sandpiper, Bijagos Archipelago, Guinea-Bissau, West Africa, 27 February 2020. © *João Belo*

Western Reef Herons and Whimbrels, he came across a Common Sandpiper that was wearing colour-rings, so he took the image above. Colleagues identified the appropriate Highland Ringing Group (HRG) project and mailed the image. This bird was trapped on the nest and ringed as a breeding male on the River Spey, near Grantown-on-Spey on 27 May 2016. The record is the first sighting of a proven British breeder to be found wintering in Guinea-Bissau. It also provided confirmation of the results of an HRG study which used geolocators to determine the wintering areas of Common Sandpipers. The geolocator study indicated that most (six out of ten marked) sandpipers spent the non-breeding season (October–February) on the coast of Guinea-Bissau, highlighting the Bijagos Archipelago as a key wintering area for Common Sandpipers that breed in Britain and perhaps elsewhere in Europe. The colour-ringed bird returned to its Speyside breeding territory by 14 April 2020, possibly via the west coast of the UK where it had been seen at Rhuddlan in North Wales on 24 April 2017.

Ron Summers and Brian Bates

Dunlin

BT93984	Juv	03/08/19	Ynyslas near Borth, Ceredigion, Wales
	Sghtd (breeding)	24/05/22	Lecht, North-East Scotland 548 km NNE, 1,027 days

An interesting resighting by Robert Rae of a Dunlin breeding in the Scottish hills, colour-ringed as a juvenile (yellow plastic ring with black characters 9L0) on the Welsh coast in early August.

Grey Wagtail

Paul Baxter has colour-ringed 84 Grey Wagtails in the past two autumns during their autumn migration over his house at Craig David Croft, near Inverbervie, North-East Scotland. He still awaits his first resighting but in the meantime Robert Rae resighted a colour-ringed bird from another project, breeding on the Tarty Burn, near Newburgh, North-East Scotland. It had been ringed on passage in Lancashire the previous autumn.

ALL5573	Juv	15/10/21	Middleton NR, Nr Heysham, Lancashire
	Sghtd (breeding)	13/05/22	Mill of Tarty, near Newburgh, North-East Scotland 370 km NNE, 221 days

Redpoll

9A90595	JuvF	23/09/21	Austur, Reykjavik, Kjosarsysla, Iceland
	Rtpd	17/04/22	Finstown, Orkney 1,139 km ESE, 206 days

This is the first record of an Icelandic ringed Redpoll in the UK.

Redwing

8C51394	Juv	08/10/20	Husoy, Nordland, Norway
	Rtpd	08/11/21	Teindland Forest, Moray 1,268 km SW, 396 days
RY33992	Ad	19/10/22	Denwick, Deerness, Orkney
	Rtpd	07/12/22	Rise Lane, Catwick, East Riding of Yorkshire 583 km SSE, 49 days
RY33992	Ad	07/10/20	Avoch, Highland
	Shot	05/01/21	Torres Novas, Portugal 2,064 km SSW, 90 days
RZ50402	Juv	17/10/22	Teindland Forest, Moray
	Shot	04/12/22	Vale da Perra, Portugal 2,033 km SSW, 48 days

An interesting series of Redwing movements from origin to passage through UK to a fateful end in Portugal.

Shag

1703598	AdM	17/06/20	Badbea, Caithness
	Sghtd	29/11/22	Geir Maol Mhoraidh Shuas, Loch Ewe 128 km SW, 896 days

This is a very unusual movement for a Shag. It is the first ringing record of a Moray Firth bird moving to the west coast. The first ever ringing movements of Shiants (west coast) Shags to the east coast were featured in a previous Ringers' Roundup (*Scottish Birds* 42(1)).

Stonechat

Following on from Alistair Pout's great sighting of the first ever Norwegian ringed Stonechat to be recorded in the UK (*Scottish Birds* 41(3)) one of Moray Souter's colour-ringed birds has produced another first, this time for a bird ringed in the UK to be found in the Netherlands. A second resighting from

Plate 46 a. Stonechat AKV5088 when ringed as a juvenile in Glen Dye, North-East Scotland, 19 July 2022. © *Moray Souter.* **b.** The same individual photographed at Rhoon, the Netherlands, 11 November 2022. © *Cornelis Fokker*

Moray's project is also shown and Alistair resighted the Norwegian ringed bird back breeding again in 2022 at the same site he first saw the bird in 2021.

AKV5088	JuvM	19/07/22	Glen Dye, North-East Scotland
	Photo	11/11/22	Rhoon, near Rotterdam, the Netherlands 727 km SSW, 115 days

The bird photographed by Cornelis Fokker in the Netherlands was still present at the same site on 16/12/22.

AKV5059	JuvM	14/07/22	Glen Dye, North-East Scotland
	Photo	08/01/23	Havergate, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk 552 km SW, 178 days

Of 55,563 Stonechats ringed in the UK up to the end of 2021, only 49 have been recovered abroad, mostly in Spain.

Plate 47. Stonechat AKV5059, Havergate, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk 8 January 2023. © *Jeremy Gaskill*

Plate 48. Waxwing (RNY), Sighthill, Edinburgh, 25 January 2023. © *Susan Falconer*

Waxwing

After a quiet couple of winters for Waxwings we had a small invasion in November 2022, 250–300 were in Aberdeen, North-East Scotland and surrounding rural villages during the second half of November and into December. We managed to colour-ring 24 and looked forward to trying to ring some more and follow them around but then cold, snowy weather arrived in the middle of December. This brought a large influx of Fieldfares into the city which converged on the ornamental rowan trees, competing with the Waxwings, and many of the trees were stripped bare of their berries in a day or two.

By Christmas, most of the Waxwings seemed to have disappeared. There was no sign of any anywhere locally which was really very strange, usually some will over-winter. The movements below show how some of the Waxwings dispersed in search of berries. NW72797 is quite unusual, returning across the North Sea so early in the winter, before the end of January.

Plate 49. Waxwing (WRY), Aalborg Øst, Denmark, 26 January 2023. © *Fleming H. Pedersen*

NW72795	AdF	29/11/22	Kincorth, Aberdeen, North-East Scotland
	Sghtd	13/12/22	Elgin, Moray, 106 km NW, 14 days (Allan Lawrence)
NW93903	JuvF	03/12/22	Inverurie, North-East Scotland
	Sghtd	25/01/23	Sighthill, Edinburgh, 156 km SSW, 53 days (Adam Dick & Susan Falconer)
NW72797	JuvF	30/11/22	Kincorth, Aberdeen, North-East Scotland
	Sghtd	26/01/23	Aalborg Ost, Denmark, 725 km E, 57 days (Fleming Pedersen)

Colour-ring Rock Pipit study at Anstruther and on adjoining Fife coasts

A brief report was published in *Scottish Birds*, volume 42(1) Ringers' Roundup p.66, at the start of a Tay RG study to explore the distances travelled by birds from their roost site in Anstruther Harbour to feeding grounds along the coast east and west. The answer to this has been established, in that the bulk of birds are seen regularly feeding at Kilrenny Mill, east of Cellardyke, 1.5 km from Anstruther, and Billow Ness 1 km west of the Harbour, with outliers 5 km to the east, at Roome Bay, Crail, and 9 km to the west, as far as Elie. In the 2021/22 winter, birds proved largely faithful to particular feeding beaches, but in winter 2022/23 (so far, to end January) many birds have changed beaches at least once between Kilrenny Mill and Billow Ness, perhaps related to the quality/quantity of bladderwrack and other seaweed deposits. To date, we have colour-rings on 95 locally ringed birds (caught at Anstruther Harbour and surrounding beaches) with another six Isle of May re-trapped birds now carrying a colour-ring.

By March 2022, it had become apparent that there were a number of Fennoscandia birds, of the *littoralis* race, in the Fife population (identified as such through control of several Norwegian birds, by a proportion of birds caught with wing length too short to be of the British *petrosus* race, and colour-ringed birds moulting into *littoralis* plumage, as only distinct and separable from the *petrosus* race in spring and summer). A note was published in *Scottish Birds*, vol 42(3) p.232–236, in September 2022: this is evidence of wintering by Scandinavian Rock Pipits, in recognition of a change of status since the late Kevin Woodbridge wrote in *BOS3* in 2007 that the winter status of *littoralis* in Scotland was 'not established'. Whilst it has been long known that *littoralis* birds occur in winter (and on passage) in Scotland, it was not clear until we had multiple colour-ring sightings over a number of months that birds were in fact spending the winter here.

Two notable birds are worthy of individual mention: colour-ring Yellow AS, recorded several times at Anstruther Harbour and Kilrenny Mill between January and March 2022, was seen, apparently breeding on Fair Isle in May and June 2022; and female Yellow AH, a *littoralis* bird whose photograph appeared in the September 2022 *Scottish Birds* note, was seen in July feeding fledged young in Pittenweem Harbour, and has become a regular feature over the 2022/23 winter feeding at Kilrenny Mill and roosting in Anstruther Harbour. The latter bird is perhaps the first proven *littoralis* bird (wing length too short for *petrosus*, and clear spring/summer *littoralis* plumage) recorded breeding in the UK.

As the study has progressed, new lines of enquiry are opening: just how many and what proportion of the wintering birds are Scandinavian, and where is their natal area in Fennoscandia; when do wintering birds arrive and depart; how many, and what proportion of the birds are local breeders; and, what is the relationship between the mainland population and birds that breed on or have fledged from the Isle of May? Much remains to be considered in terms of the winter population to determine where the *petrosus* birds breed, as there would seem to be too many in the study area to match anticipated East Neuk and Isle of May breeding pairs. Effort will be allocated in coming springs and summers to map breeding territories and ring adults and nestlings, so that we can get a better feel for their proportions and presence amongst the wintering population. There is much to keep us occupied in the months ahead!

Mike Martin

Changes to the SBRC List

M. LEWIS, D. STEEL & C.J. McINERNY

In December 2021 members of the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) voted on criteria to be used to formalise the inclusion or removal from the list of rare bird species and subspecies that the committee considers, the SBRC List (www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/sbrc-list-past-lists). Up to this point, species have been added to the SBRC List when they were removed from the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) list (www.bbrc.org.uk/main-information/species-taxa). In the past, species have been removed from the SBRC List on an *ad hoc* basis, with the more numerous species being removed. For example Marsh Warbler and Blyth's Reed Warbler, Olive-backed Pipit and Little Bunting were removed in 2020, with these instead considered by local Scottish records committees (McInerny & McGowan 2021).

Employing defined criteria to formalise this process makes it transparent and accountable, and allows Local Recorders and local records committees to look at the data and assess which species might be the next to be delegated to them. To do this, records of all SBRC species and a suite of other rare Scottish birds were assessed for the period 1999–2018 to inform SBRC's voting. Numbers of records were taken from SBRC databases (www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/sbrc-species-analysis), from data published in the Online Scottish Bird Report (www.the-soc.org.uk/about-us/online-scottish-bird-report), or received directly from Local Recorders. The criteria were implemented based upon data available as of 31 December 2021.

Removal of species from the SBRC List

SBRC decided to follow BBRC's precedent and remove species that occur on average 10 times or more per year in Scotland. To avoid species dropping in and out of the list too frequently, SBRC will delay the removal of any species averaging ten records in a year for five years. If, after this five year period the average continues to be more then 10 records per year, then the species will be removed from the SBRC List. Currently, no species meet these criteria for removal, although both Arctic Warbler and Greenish Warbler came very close within the period of review.

Addition of species to the SBRC List

Species delegated by BBRC will automatically go onto the SBRC List, for a minimum of five years. If, after five years there are more than ten records per year, they will be removed from the SBRC List and delegated to local records committees.

Records of many previously more regular species are decreasing across Scotland, to the point where several are now much rarer than many species SBRC already considers. SBRC decided that observers and local records committees would be familiar with these species and as such, voted to admit only the rarest of these to the list. This familiarity, and also a desire to minimise the SBRC workload, justified using a different threshold to that used for removal of species. As such, those birds with five or fewer records per year in Scotland would be admitted to the SBRC List. A delay period of five years will ensure that only species that consistently meet the threshold will be admitted. If at this point the species is assessed by BBRC again, as it meets their British criteria, then SBRC will not also assess this species.

Delegation to recording areas or ecologically meaningful groups of recording areas

Where 50% or more records of a newly added species have occurred in a single recording area, or an ecologically meaningful grouping of recording areas (for example 'the Northern Isles', 'Western Isles' or 'Scottish border counties'), these records will be assessed by the relevant local records committees.

Table 1. Bird species to be added to the SBRC List, due to their increased rarity in Scotland.

Species	Delegated to	Year of implementation
Red-crested Pochard	-	2023
Little Owl	Borders, Dumfries & Galloway	2023
Bee-eater	-	2023
Marsh Tit	Borders	2023

Summary

In summary:

- Birds occurring ten or more times per year in Scotland, over five years, will be removed from the SBRC List.
- Species occurring fewer than five times per year in Scotland, over five years, will be added to the SBRC List.
- Among these added species, where 50% of all records come from a single recording area or ecologically meaningful group of recording areas, assessment will be delegated local committees in those recording areas.

Changes to the SBRC List

No species meet the threshold for removal from the SBRC List at present.

Species currently meeting the threshold of fewer than five records per year and so added to the SBRC List are: Red-crested Pochard, Little Owl, Bee-eater and Marsh Tit (Table 1).

All Red-crested Pochard and Bee-eater records from across Scotland will be assessed by SBRC.

In contrast, only records of Little Owl away from the Scottish border recording areas of Borders and Dumfries & Galloway, and records of Marsh Tit away from Borders, will be assessed by SBRC.

These four species will be added to the SBRC List on 1 January 2023, assuming that the patterns of occurrence do not change during 2022.

Potential future additions to the list

Leaving species delegated by BBRC aside, the next additions to the SBRC List may come from a pool of declining regular species, rather than rare trans-Atlantic American waders or Eastern Palearctic scarcities. Bewick's Swan (averaging 8.5 records per year) and Black-necked Grebe (6.4 records per year) are both strong candidates if their numbers continue to drop. Likewise, Temminck's Stint numbers appear to be declining and this species only just made the cut, with 5.3 records per year on average. Pallas's Warbler also came very close to meeting the five records per year criteria but, although this species has occurred in low numbers recently, its propensity for occasional influxes of larger numbers may keep it off the SBRC List. Other species SBRC will be regularly reviewing include Bittern (7.7 records per year) and Ring-billed Gull (7.0 records per year, although some of these may be duplicate records of wandering individuals). The latter has shown a similar decline in records across Britain and has been suggested by BBRC to be considered by this committee again.

Acknowledgments

We thank the Local Recorders for supplying data which contributed to this analysis.

Reference

McInerny, C.J. & McGowan, R.Y. 2022. Scottish Birds Records Committee report on rare birds in Scotland, 2020. *Scottish Birds* 42: 99–118.

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David Steel, SBRC member &
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Plate 50. Female Ring-necked Duck (right) and Scaup, Yetholm Loch, Borders, 16 January 2022. © *Richard Jackson*

2022 – A Bumper Year for Rarities in Scottish Borders

R. JACKSON

This has been an exciting year for rare birds in the Borders, with an unprecedented seven firsts for the county (subject to ratification) and a strong supporting cast of second to fifth records alongside. Although the overall species counts has yet to be fully completed, it also looks to be the best number of species ever recorded in a year in Borders. There have been four 'BBRC species' seen and a further eight requiring SBRC validation. In most recent years it has been only one or two each of BBRC/SBRC species, at most.

The county list has grown steadily since the 1980s, generally increasing by a species or two each year over the last 25 years but with many years of no new birds (Figure 1). As might be expected, there was slightly faster growth in the 1980s and early 1990s, but even then the best year for firsts was 1983 with five.

With a relatively small population of local birders and a lot of territory to cover, the county is generally under-watched, so some of these 'firsts' are, no doubt, the county finally 'catching up', but it is not particularly clear why there should be such a good showing of rarities this year. They have come from both coastal hot-spots and more obscure inland areas and are spread over five months of the year, with some back-end loading towards November and December. But has any other area in Scotland seen so many new birds in a year?

This article will briefly describe these seven first records in order of their occurrence, using the finders' first-hand accounts where they are available, followed by a short summary of the other rare finds and some speculation as to what might be seen next.

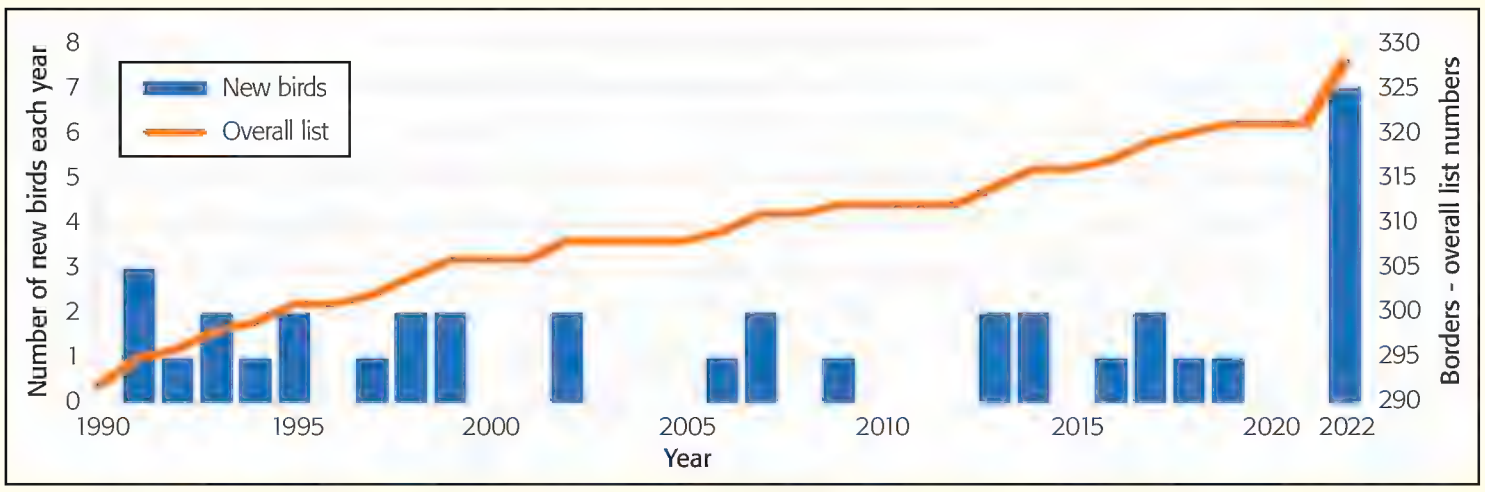

Figure 1. New birds and overall species list for Borders, 1990–2022.

Ring-necked Ducks, Yetholm Loch, January & April 2022

I (RJ) was on an organised count of wintering Gadwall in the Borders on 16 January 2022, covering the small pond at Yetholm village and the larger Yetholm Loch on the other side of the hill. At about 09:30 hrs, I was scanning with a telescope across the loch from the boat house, trying to make sure there were no further Gadwall just popping out from the reeds, when I came across an Aythya duck in the middle of the loch. I instantly recognised this as a female Ring-necked Duck. It was loosely associating with a small group of Tufted Ducks and a Scaup, which were all diving occasionally and moving steadily to my right.

Reminding myself to check through the ID features systematically to confirm things and to rule out a possible hybrid, I looked away briefly, only to find the bird had now disappeared.

After a few minutes searching, I re-found the bird, on the far reedy bank of the loch. I could still see the peaked head shape, pale markings around the eye and bill base on both sides and a strong suggestion of a pale peak on the front of the flanks. The pale band on the bill tip was difficult to see at times, but I was happy to confirm the identification.

On continuing to observe the bird after each dive, I then noticed a second bird slowly emerging from the reeds. Unbelievably, this also looked like a female Ring-necked Duck. After a few moments the two birds swam along happily together and confirmed I really was seeing double! The second bird was noticeably paler around the head, although the even paler markings around the eyes and bill-base could still be seen.

Later the same day the birds could not be found, nor the day after, but they were rediscovered on 18 January and showed intermittently until the 22nd, amidst reports of boat disturbance from anglers on the loch and nearby pheasant shoots. As a further post-script, I revisited Yetholm Loch on 17 April 2022, again as part of a co-ordinated Gadwall count. Whilst observing an uncommon summer-plumaged Red-necked Grebe (and a Pochard), a female Ring-necked Duck again just appeared in my 'scope. This was surely one of the birds from January, but where had it been in the meantime, and was it hidden elsewhere in the Borders? It was reported again on 18 April, but not subsequently.

Having seen Ring-necked Ducks in most recent years (in England), I was amazed to find this was the first record for the Scottish Borders.

This was indeed the first accepted record (of two birds). [A record in 1990 from Hule Moss, by the late Ray Murray, was rejected by BBRC, for unknown reasons]. Borders would appear to be the last Scottish recording area to have a record of Ring-necked Duck, and long overdue it is too!

Across the UK there was an influx of Ring-necked Ducks in winter 2021/22, and these two were almost certainly part of this larger movement.

Plate 51. Female Ring-necked Ducks, Yetholm Loch, Borders, 16 January 2022. © *Richard Jackson*

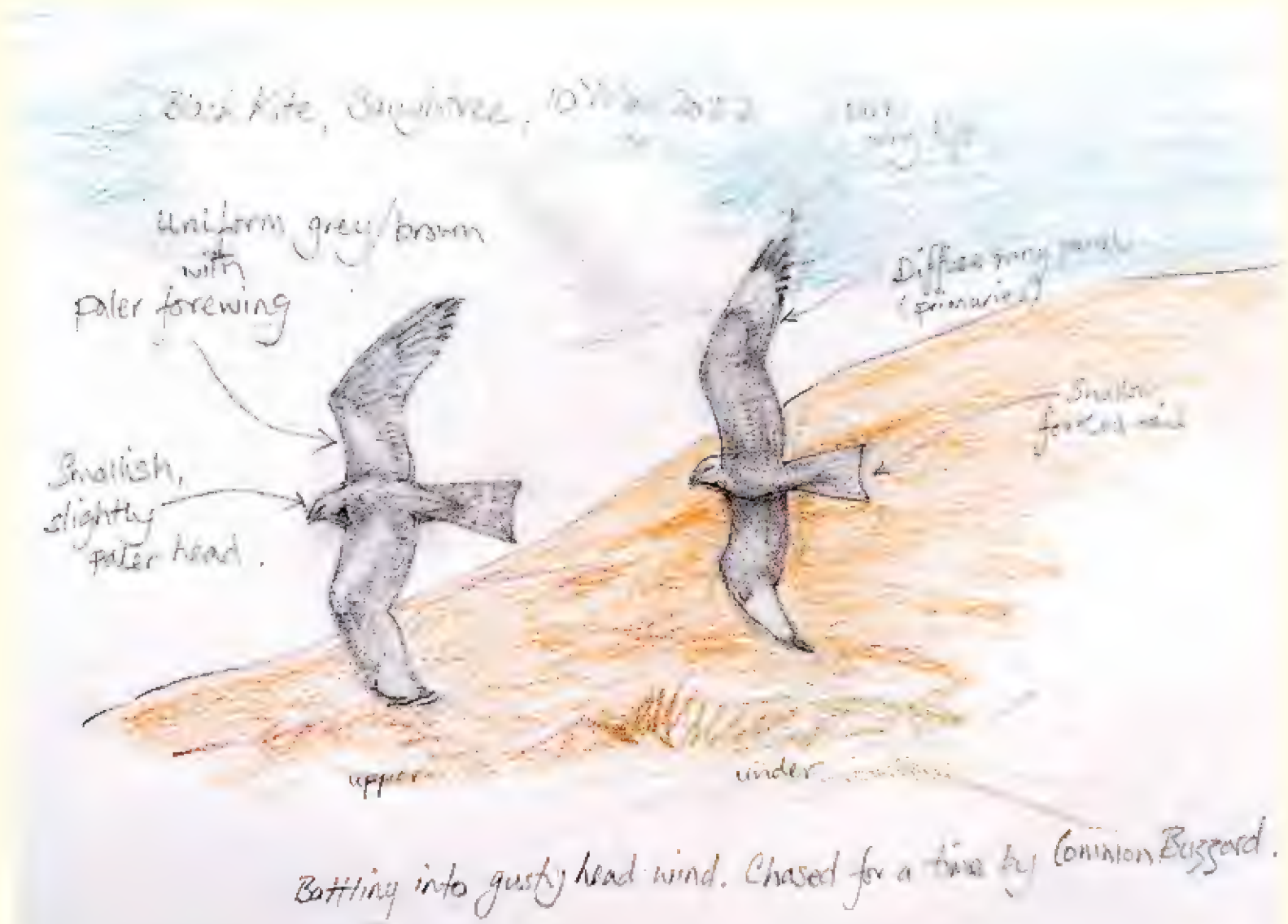

Plate 52. Sketch of Black Kite, Saughtree, Borders, 10 May 2022 © *David Braithwaite*

Black Kite, Saughtree (near Newcastleton), May 2022

This was well-observed by experienced bird-watcher David Braithwaite, near to his home.

On 10 May I (DB) had taken a short trip down to Kielder Water to scan the reservoir and maybe see an Osprey fishing. The day was one of quite strong westerly winds and the water was choppy, so without seeing much at all I headed for home in the afternoon.

Travelling back from Kielder to Newcastleton along the twisting single-track road by the Liddel Water and approaching Saughtree Farm, I turned a curving bend and saw two large raptors to my right. They were close to the ground and close to each other, flying away from me and struggling into the wind. The nearer appeared to be chivvying the further. The gusty headwind was obviously keeping them low. At this point they were close, down to about 50 metres at their closest. I pulled the car onto the grassy verge and grabbed the bins from the passenger seat. The two birds were so intent on their quarrel that they paid no attention to the presence of my car ... and I made no attempt to get out. Instead, I watched the birds both through the open driver's door window and the car windscreen.

The closer bird was clearly a normal morph Common Buzzard. The other, due to the relatively long-wings, slightly forked tail, smallish head and jaunty flight pattern, was immediately recognisable as a 'kite'.

The buzzard broke off from its attack and went off to my left across the Liddel Water and into a small group of trees. The kite continued its low flight, making little headway into the gusting wind. It climbed occasionally as it wrestled with the wind that lifted it up over my head and over the banking to my right.

I quickly became aware that this was not a Red Kite ... there were none of the orangey, rufous or warm browns with contrasting greys that make Red Kites such beautiful birds. The lack of 'colour' on this bird was immediately obvious on the upper tail that was a feature I had a clear view of as the bird was chivvied by the buzzard. Typically, the tail was being 'angled' as the kite contorted its flight path to avoid the buzzard's attentions. The tail was shallowly forked and dull greyish brown. This colouration was relatively uniform across the upper parts except for paler grey forewings which were only subtly contrasting. Additionally, the wings and tail were not as relatively long as with Red Kite, but the wingspan was nevertheless greater than that of the buzzard.

I had good views of the underparts as the bird lifted up above the bank ridge to my right a couple of times. The colouring was much as the upper parts with very little contrast. The primaries were dark tipped with a paler panel visible on the underside. This panelling was clear but only subtly contrasting. The small head was slightly paler but not markedly different in colour to the rest of the bird. There could be no doubt that this was a Black Kite. Certainly not a bird I had ever expected to encounter in the Borders, but that, as they say, is birding for you!

This is the first substantiated record of Black Kite in the Borders and has been accepted by SBRC. This follows rejected or un-documented records at Eyemouth in 1995, at The Hirsel in 2007 and at Camptown in 2014. There have been well over 50 records of Black Kite in Scotland, and the Borders should be well-placed to receive this continental species, so this one also counts as 'well overdue'.

White-winged Black Tern, Cowdrait-Burnmouth, September 2022

This attractive small tern was found by local birders Chris Green and Alistair Cutter. Chris describes how the sighting came about.

On the morning of 5 September 2022 I (CG) set out, determined to practise sea-watching (not a skill of mine) at Eyemouth. However, as I drove up the A1, I was unable to resist dropping in at Burnmouth - a site I'm far more familiar and comfortable with. As I left the car, just beyond the harbour, I immediately saw a flock of terns, in flight and perched - quite unusual for this location.

Plate 53. White-winged Black Tern, Burnmouth, Borders, 5 September 2022. © *Alistair Cutter*

I started scanning those perched on the rocks - Sandwich and Common Terns, with a scattering of gulls, and soon came across a small tern perched low between a Kittiwake and a Black-headed Gull. My immediate thought was that this was a juvenile Black Tern - a thought I continued to hold even though consultation with Collins indicated that the lack of a dark breast patch pointed to White-winged Black Tern. Soon, the bird flew off, leaving me uncertain as to identification.

A little later, by great good fortune, Alistair Cutter arrived (his first return to the site since I'd shown him around earlier in the year) armed with his camera. I told him about the bird, we searched for a while, then Alistair wandered off in search of waders to photograph.

Within 15 minutes, the tern returned - a phone-call brought Alistair hurrying back, and a series of photos was taken. At this point, I phoned my wife to tell her I may have found a White-winged Black Tern. Alistair and I then observed the bird on-and-off over a three hour period as it rested and intermittently fed along the surf-line amongst the other terns. We discussed the lack of a dark breast patch, the pale rump visible as it dropped to feed along the surf and the darkness of the mantle, but ultimately decided to rely on the outcome of the photos to determine identity. We were both unaware at the time, that if identified as a White-winged Black Tern, it would be a Borders' first.

That evening, looking through Alistair's excellent photos, it became apparent to us both that I'd found the Borders' first White-winged Black Tern - a record I may well not have had the confidence to claim without the serendipitous arrival of Alistair, and his photographic skills.

Unfortunately the bird was not seen thereafter. This is another first that could be seen as 'overdue', with over 80 records in Scotland to date, many of them along the eastern coastal counties. The Borders does not have any large wetland areas, however, unlike the neighbouring counties, which could explain this tardy addition to the Borders list!

Plate 54. Pallid Harrier, near Newcastleton, Borders, 9 November 2022. © *Paul Cook*

Pallid Harrier, near Newcastleton, November 2022

This harrier was seen by a visiting birder, Paul Cook, in the extensive forest area near Newcastleton (at Wilson's Pike, within a couple of kilometres of the English border). By coincidence, this was the same general area where the Black Kite was seen in May. Paul describes the encounter.

On 9 November 2022, while walking in a forest close to Newcastleton in the Scottish Borders, I (PC) had already had a good day watching Hen Harrier and displaying Goshawk on a pleasant weather day. The afternoon had gone a little quiet until I picked up a raptor at approximately 100 metre range flying directly towards me. As the bird banked, I knew I was watching another harrier. The jizz of the birds' flight however, soon took me back to last year in Saudi Arabia. There, I was lucky enough to see thousands of harriers during three months spent in the spring and three months in the autumn whilst working. An experience of over 4,500 Pallid Harriers told me even on my first view this bird was a Pallid.

I've told many friends that Pallids in flight are very distinctive and have an almost Black-headed Gull type flight. It was the exact buoyant way this juvenile was flying, and as it came much closer to me I was able to nail all of the main features. The very pale collar with dark cheeks stood out immediately. The underside of the secondaries were a dark grey, and under wing coverts plain chestnut. The body of the bird was a clean chestnut colour too and no streaking was seen. The upperparts were a brownish colour with darkish secondaries. A white rump was clearly visible but I mainly watched the bird from below during the three minute view. The bird's wings were pointy which can be seen in my (poor I'm afraid) attached photograph.

The bird flew from the north-east to a south-westerly direction and I did not see it again. Thankfully my experience of many harriers in 2021 makes me 100% certain this bird was a Pallid Harrier.

There were no further sightings in the area. A juvenile was reported on Islay a few days before on 6 November and one was in Cornwall from the 14th, but there is nothing specific to link these records.

Although this raptor has become an increasingly regular vagrant to Scotland since 2011, with around 60 records, the majority of these are from Shetland and it remains a very rare bird on the mainland. Two records from St Abb's Head in September 2010 and October 2011 were both rejected by BBRC, so this would become the first record for Borders (if accepted by BBRC). To have two rare raptors (this bird and the Black Kite) reported in much the same (under-watched) area is a remarkable coincidence.

Caspian Gull, Eyemouth, November 2022

Whilst in transit through the Borders, very experienced birder Mark Pearson had a very good sighting of a Caspian Gull off Eyemouth as part of an excellent seawatch on 14 November 2022. He reported the results through Twitter and attached an excellent 'back-of camera' photo of the gull (below).

There were no further sightings and this record has yet to be submitted locally and to SBRC.

This gull remains very rare in Scotland, with the majority of records coming from Lothian. The first Scottish record was as recent as 2006, following a split from Herring Gull and Yellow-legged Gull. The difficulties in identification could well be confounding its true status in Borders (and Scotland).

Plate 55. Twitter post for Caspian Gull (third-winter), Eyemouth, Borders, 14 November 2022. © *Mark Pearson*

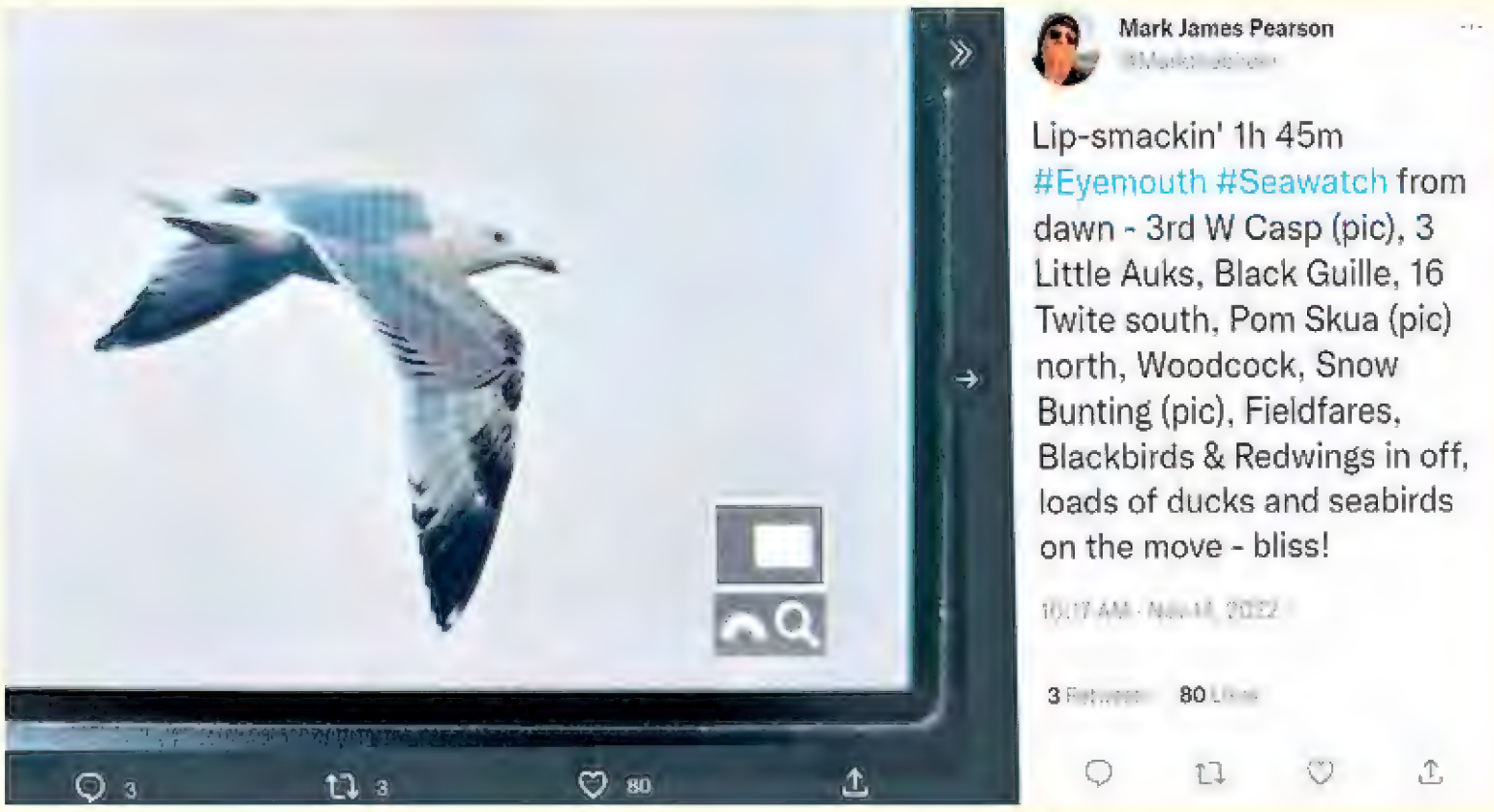
Mark James Pearson
Lip-smackin' 1h 45m #Eyemouth #Seawatch from dawn - 3rd W Casp (pic), 3 Little Auks, Black Guille, 16 Twite south, Pom Skua (pic) north, Woodcock, Snow Bunting (pic), Fieldfares, Blackbirds & Redwings in off, loads of ducks and seabirds on the move - bliss!
3
80

Plate 56 a–b. Hume's Leaf Warbler, Mire Loch (St Abb's Head), Borders, 22 November 2022. © *Kris Gibb*

Hume's Leaf Warbler, St Abb's Head, November 2022

This cryptic warbler was found by Ciaran Hatsell, the NTS ranger at St Abb's Head NNR. He picks up the story of the find:

It was seal season at St Abb's Head NNR and that means one thing - patrols and fence checks! After a cracking early morning seawatch on 21 November, during which I was lucky enough to have an absolute brute of a White-billed Diver head past south not far offshore, I discovered a Grey Seal pup on a beach at Burnmouth Harbour. I went back to base to get the equipment for the fence and headed back down the Mire Dean.

Walking with all the equipment, including a wheelbarrow and a backpack full of fencing kit, I was about to go through the small gate and noticed some movement in the buckthorn up ahead. Putting down the wheelbarrow and lifting my bins, I saw the head of a warbler partially covered by the undergrowth and was immediately struck by how pallid and greyish looking the cap and mantle were. This was a YBW type but given the overall colouration and late date I strongly suspected it would turn into a Hume's, which it did!

Some birds hit you right in the chops but it never helps to be too hasty in the ID process, a trap I've fallen into quite dramatically in the past! As it flitted in the buckthorn, I noticed a weak second wing bar, lack of any green/yellow tones to the upperparts and an overall washed out, pallid impression. It was amazing how greyish and washed out the upperparts were - frosty and Sibe-chiff-esque!

Happy it was a Hume's after slightly better views, I stuck the news out and phoned two of the county's biggest legends, Fran Evans and Dave Graham. When I first moved to the area, they were both instrumental in making me feel welcome and providing tales of birding folklore which fed my enthusiasm to keep on birding here. The bird eventually gave itself up and started calling frequently, a very distinctive, Pied Wagtail-esque disyllabic call which often gave away its presence.

It would loosely associate with the tit flocks roaming between the Mire Loch boathouse and the buckthorn near the Loch outfall, often quite variable in its feeding habits, being very arboreal one minute and then keeping low and skulking the next! As far as I know it was last seen on 25 November at 14:05 hrs in the same patch of buckthorn. I was chuffed most people who visited managed to see it - good birds should be shared!

Anything, anywhere, anytime!

There are around 30 records of this Central Asian warbler in Scotland, although most have been in the Northern Isles and north-east Scotland. This record coincided with multiple sightings in eastern England from Northumberland to Norfolk and there were two sightings in Shetland earlier in November.

Cattle Egret, Sprouston (near Kelso), December 2022

Whilst on a SOC branch outing on 3 December 2022, towards the end of a walk between Carham and Sprouston on the River Tweed, Neil Hinchliff spotted an obvious egret species in a field with horses near Whitmuirhaugh Farm. Alerting Gavin Paterson and then the others in the group nearby, it was quickly established that this was a Cattle Egret, with the small and dumpy build and yellow bill being very distinctive. It continued to feed in the field at *c.* 100 m distance, allowing plenty of photographs to be taken, before the group resumed the walk to the finish point in Sprouston village.

In later discussion with the residents at the farm, it seemed that the bird had been present since early October, sometimes in the company of a second bird, which was presumed to be a Little Egret

The bird continued to be seen each day until 7 December, although it did sometimes 'go missing' for a few hours. The change to cold icy conditions may well have moved it on. At least this stay allowed it to be seen by most of the local birders.

Despite the huge growth in distribution and numbers in the southern England, this remains a rare bird in Scotland, with annual totals generally only two or three birds at most. The first record for Lothian was as recent as 2017 and there have only been a handful of records to date in Dumfries & Galloway.

Other notable records

In addition to these Firsts, there have also been the following notable records:

Paddyfield Warbler - At Mire Loch (St Abb's Head) in August (2nd record) (see p.85).

Pallid Swift - At St Abb's, four birds together in October (2nd record)

Purple Heron - Teviot Haughs in August (3rd Record)

Cory's Shearwater - St Abb's village/Dowlaw in September (2 reports) (4th+ records)

Great Shearwater - off Eyemouth in August/September (2–3 reports) (5th+ records)

Pectoral Sandpiper - Birgham Haughs in September (5th record)

Montagu's Harrier - Alemoor Reservoir in August (6th record)

Plate 57. Cattle Egret, Sprouston, Borders, 3 December 2022. © *Richard Jackson*

Plate 58. Pectoral Sandpiper, Birgham, Borders, 7 September 2022. © *Martin Moncrieff*

The Future - so what is next for the Borders list?

One major gap is Avocet! Despite a relatively frequent presence in neighbouring Lothian and breeding in central Northumberland, there has never been a record of this unmistakeable icon. Two Black-winged Stilts have arrived (in 1986 and 2019), but no Avocet, as yet! Surely a passing bird is overdue at Newmains (Reston) or elsewhere?

There would also appear to be potential areas for a Cetti's Warbler to be found dispersing in late autumn, like Mire Loch, Yetholm Loch or the downstream reaches of the Tweed. So far, they seem to have leapt from Holy Island straight to Fife! Similarly a second record of Bearded Tit seems very overdue, with the last, and only sighting so far, in October 1998.

Of the wildfowl, it seems very unlikely that the rare (and recently split) Scoters found in north Northumberland and the Firth of Forth might appear, as most scoters seem to be in a hurry to get past the Borders coast. Perhaps a Blue-winged Teal is more possible on one of the freshwater lochs.

Other rare and scarce waders also seem very unlikely, given that Little Stints are less than annual and the last Curlew Sandpiper was in 2005. This year's Pectoral Sandpiper offers some encouragement that a White-rumped Sandpiper or Buff-breasted Sandpiper (or rarer) might be found though. An American Golden Plover is, perhaps, more possible amongst the sometimes large flocks of European Golden Plovers.

Passing seabirds also seem a distinct possibility, given the successes this year. More checking of coastal harbours and/or intense sea-watching could perhaps find a Fea's Petrel, Bonaparte's Gull, Ring-billed Gull or a Caspian Tern.

Several of the passerines that have been seen relatively commonly in nearby counties like Red-throated Pipit, Tawny Pipit or Short-toed Lark now seem to be getting scarcer or even very rare, so Borders could well have missed its chance for one of these. Perhaps a first Blyth's Reed Warbler is now more realistic.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the observers who have shared these rare bird experiences and allowed me the use of their words and photographs to produce this article. Hopefully I have done them justice.

Richard Jackson, Leitholm, Berwickshire.
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The Black Kite record has been accepted by the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC). The remaining records are subject to acceptance by the relevant records committees.

Plate 59. Juvenile Caspian Gull, Donmouth, Aberdeen, North-East Scotland, 27 August 2022. © *Adam Bassett*

Caspian Gulls in North-East Scotland, 2nd–4th North-East Scotland records, August 2022

A. BASSETT & M. LEWIS

Donmouth, 27 August 2022 - Adam Bassett

I live in south Buckinghamshire where Caspian Gulls are relatively frequent and have seen in excess of 100 birds over the past ten years, including full juveniles with increasing regularity - the first this year arriving on 31 July.

Our family holiday this summer was to North-East Scotland, centred in Aberdeen. On the morning of 27 August, I had left the family back at our digs and driven to the Donmouth area to watch the coastal waders and terns - all a nice change from my usual inland species. There were quite a few birds gathered on the beach and I began scoping them from the top of a sand dune. I wasn't looking at the gulls specifically, but soon caught sight of a juvenile large white headed gull half hidden behind an adult. Caspian Gulls have quite a distinctive look and this bird struck me immediately as being good for a juvenile Caspian Gull. I waited until it emerged in full and was happy that this is what it was.

I had a vague idea that this was probably a good bird for this area, so decided that I ought to obtain some record shots as proof. The bird was probably several hundred yards away and initial shots on a gloomy morning were not good. I needed to get closer, so descended the dune and began walking towards the birds on the shore line, stopping every so often so as not to spook anything and try for better shots. Luckily the Caspian Gull looked fairly settled and after standing on one leg, eventually sat down on the beach. Being on holiday, my time was limited, but just before I left, the bird took a short flight, so the tail and open wings, both upper and under, were all seen.

Plate 60. Juvenile Caspian Gull, Donmouth, Aberdeen, North-East Scotland, 27 August 2022. © *Adam Bassett*

My experience of Caspian Gulls is that the whole suite of identification features needs to be seen in order to exclude other species and hybrids. This bird has the typical structure: pear-shaped head with a 'snouty' look; long, fairly narrow and mostly parallel-sided bill; high breasted; minimal tertial step giving a smooth top line to long pointed primaries; long slender legs with typically long exposed tibia.

Plumage wise it is full juvenile but has begun its post-juvenile moult and replaced a few scapular feathers. Overall, it has a smooth mid-brown look to the uppers and white below, with a whitish head and dark streaks just around the eye. The scapulars are quite plain mid-brown with pale edging, most noticeable on the larger lower scapular feathers. A few of the upper scapulars have been replaced, showing as pale grey feathers with narrow black anchor internal marks. The coverts are generally dark centred and plain looking with pale edges, with the outer greater coverts showing as more solidly blackish and the inner greater coverts a bit more marked with much white in the tips. The tertials are solid dark brown with pale tips in the usual 'thumb nail' shape.

The white under-tail coverts are relatively unmarked compared to juvenile Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls and show sparse large black chevrons along the visible sides, similar to Yellow-legged Gull. The tail is mainly white with a well-defined broad black bar of even width at the tip. The underwing is quite pale and much less marked than other large gulls. Finally, bare parts: bill mainly black; legs a nice pale pink, typical of this species.

Girdle Ness, 30 August 2022 - Mark Lewis

The day started well on 30 August; an early morning seawatch from Girdle Ness had delivered Cory's Shearwater, Sabine's Gull and a smart juvenile Long-tailed Skua, so at lunchtime I was feeling pretty relaxed about finding rarities and settled into my normal route round the headland to count wildfowl and waders. Part of this involved scanning the large outer breakwater on the south side of Aberdeen harbour, where among the large gulls, Oystercatchers, and more recently Ringed Plovers have started to roost.

With wader numbers from the breakwater in the notebook, I gave the large gulls a quick scan and was stopped in my tracks by a large and leggy 1cy gull with a whitish head and a long narrow bill. My subconscious yelled Caspian Gull but acknowledged the more cautious part of my brain's desire to try and remember, and then check, some useful features! While setting up the scope I was running through things in my head; tertials, greater coverts, feather boa, saggy nappy, and once the scope was up I was able to see all of these things very clearly. As well as the structural details the tertials checked out - dark with narrow pale 'fingernail cuttings' at the tips. Likewise, the greater coverts looked good too. Dark bases and pale tips, becoming narrowly barred on the inner feathers. The greyish streaky boa looked great, the dark, narrow, parallel sided bill looked the business, the nappy was indeed saggy and then it occurred to me that I didn't have my camera... I'd seen enough to put the news out though.

Luckily for me, a complete stranger with a camera happened to be walking past. It turned out that Alastair Taylor, although perhaps a little bemused by the request, would quite happily take some pictures and email them to me, no matter how many times I muttered saggy nappy. I always feel like I can relax and enjoy a rare bird a lot more once there are some photos of it, which allowed me to get back to the scope and start to really take this bird in. It was at that point that I noticed the red ring on the right tibia. I knew at least one recent Scottish Caspian Gull had also carried this sort of ring and I knew that the ringers would be able to answer the question of a hybrid a lot better than I could, so I started trying to get the ring combo. Birders started to arrive shortly after and with their help, we settled on the ring reading OY. This was emailed to the ringers later that day who confirmed that the bird was a pure Caspian Gull from a Dutch breeding colony.

Plate 61. Juvenile Caspian Gull, Girdle Ness, Aberdeen, North-East Scotland, 30 August 2022. © *Ian Broadbent*

Plate 62. Juvenile Caspian Gull, Girdle Ness, Aberdeen, North-East Scotland, 30 August 2022. © *Ian Broadbent*

This was the third record of Caspian Gull in the region during 2022, with just one previous record from Peterhead on 10 January 2009. While this could be a coincidence, it feels more likely that we will begin to see this species on Scotland's eastern coast more regularly in late summer going forward. This species has expanded its breeding range westward in recent years, and there are now over 7,600 breeding pairs in Central and Western Europe. There are at least two colonies in the Netherlands, which have increased to 45 breeding pairs in 2021 from their establishment in 2016, and both of the ringed birds recorded in North-East Scotland during 2022 came from these colonies. The first, seen by Doug Grant at the Ugie Estuary on 3 August, carried a red ring with the code OR. This was found during one of Doug's gull watching sessions, where Darvic-ringed birds are often from Norwegian schemes. It was thought to be a Herring Gull at the time, but came back as a Caspian Gull.

If range expansions and population growth continues, it seems likely that Scottish east coast occurrences will become more regular. Late August has become a great time to look out for Mediterranean Gulls in this part of the world, and maybe Caspian Gull will become more firmly on the radar in years to come too. To date, there are 15 accepted records of Caspian Gull from Scotland, with the majority (12/15) referring to immature birds, either in their first or second calendar years. Almost all (13/15) are from sites on the east coast. Earlier records of this species were more likely to come from winter months, with more recent records clustering in spring and autumn. Is this a real change or are we now clued up enough to scan through gull flocks with an eye towards Caspian and Yellow-legged Gulls, rather than just the Glaucous and Iceland Gulls that we may have looked for in the past?

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The Girdle Ness bird has been accepted by the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC), whereas the Ugie Estuary and Donmouth birds are still subject to acceptance by SBRC.

Plate 63. Cory's Shearwater, Kinghorn, Fife, 26 July 2022. © *Nigel Voaden*

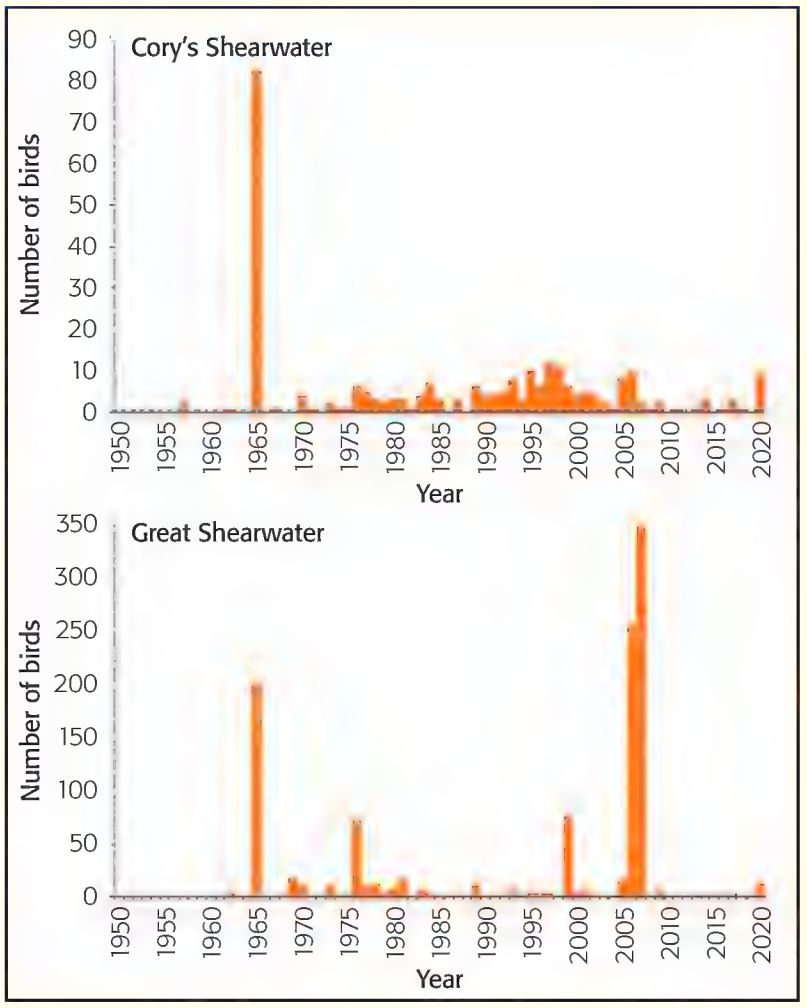
Unusually large numbers of Cory's Shearwaters and Great Shearwaters seen in Scotland during the summer and autumn of 2022

C.J. McINERNY

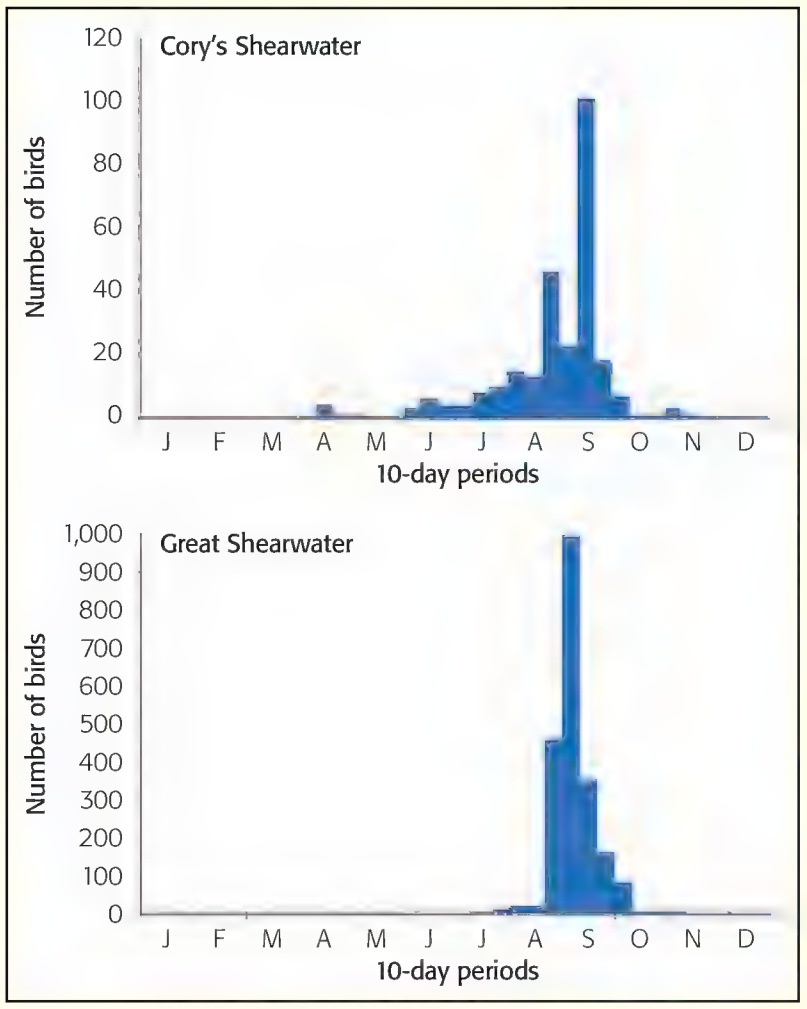
Introduction

Cory's Shearwaters *Calonectris borealis* and Great Shearwaters *Ardenna gravis* are rare visitors to Scottish marine waters (Forrester *et al.* 2007; McInerny & McGowan 2022). In most years very small numbers are seen during the late summer and autumn, particularly during September, although in some years neither species are observed, and there have been larger influxes, with an exceptional *c.* 9,000 Great Shearwaters in 2007 (Figures 1–2).

Both shearwater species nest on islands in the mid and southern Atlantic: Cory's mostly on the



Figures 1–2. Annual and seasonal occurrence of Cory's Shearwaters and Great Shearwaters in Scotland by 10-day periods, 1950–2020 (McInerny & McGowan 2022). Note that in 2007 about 9,000 Great Shearwaters were observed; the graph has been plotted to truncate the data for this year to allow of resolution of the much smaller numbers seen in all other years. To examine the SBRC datasets from which these graphs are plotted see https://www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/sbrc-species-analysis



Figures 1–2. Continued.

Azores, Madeira, the Salvages, and the Canary Islands; and Great on more southern islands including Tristan da Cunha (Onley & Scofield 2007). Post-breeding, they disperse to the North and South Atlantic with birds seen regularly off south-west England and Ireland in the summer and autumn, and more occasionally as far north as Scotland, even entering the North Sea around the north side of the country.

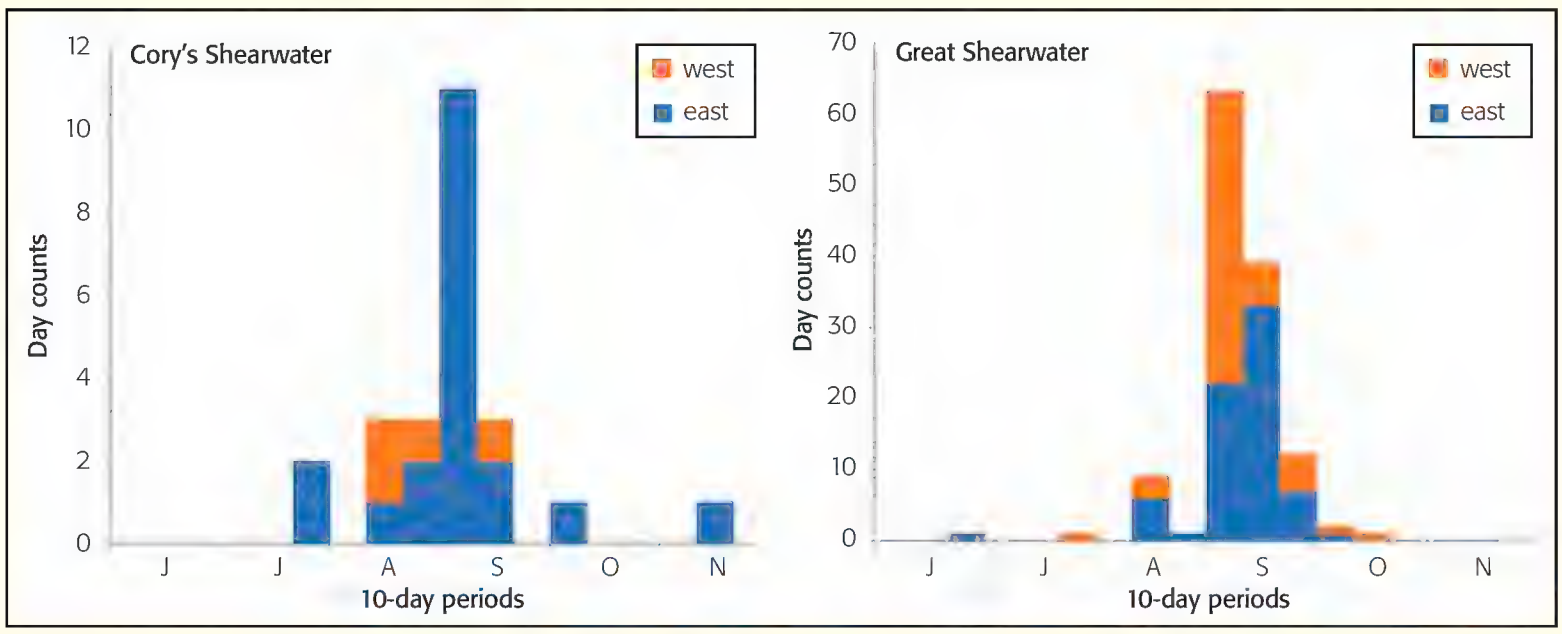
Observations in Scotland during 2022

Against this background, unusually large numbers of both species were observed in Scotland during 2022 (Figures 3–4).

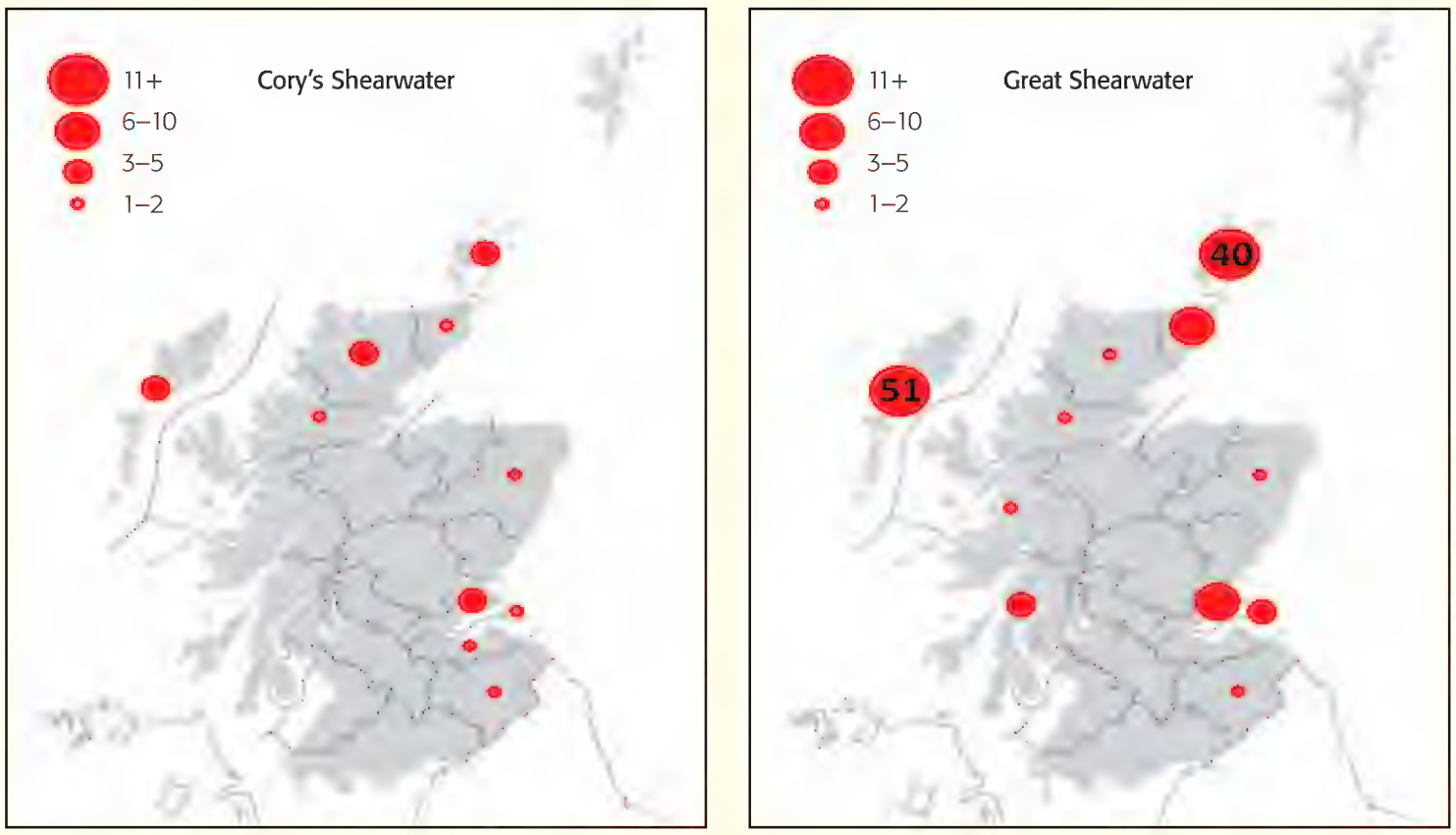
The first reported was a Great Shearwater seen from North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 29 June*. The next were one of each species recorded in late July: a tideline corpse of a Great Shearwater found at Cladach a' Ghlinne, Isle of Skye (Skye & Lochalsh) on 21 July; and a Cory's Shearwater off Kinghorn (Fife) which lingered, sometimes close to land, from 25–30 July (plates 63–65).

Subsequently, the two species were seen off both the west coast from Tiree (Argyll) and in the Minch (Outer Hebrides and Ross & Cromarty), and off the east coast from Orkney and Caithness south to Borders (Figures 5–6).

In total at least 23 Cory's Shearwaters and 125 Great Shearwaters were reported in Scotland during 2022 (Figures 3–4). However, these numbers should be considered provisional, as it is likely that they will increase when more records are submitted to the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC). Interestingly, most Cory's were seen along the east coast but, in contrast, more Great Shearwaters were seen along the west coast, particularly in the Minch, and from North Ronaldsay (Figures 5–6).



Figures 3–4. Seasonal occurrence of Cory's Shearwaters and Great Shearwaters in Scotland by 10-day periods, west and east coasts, 2022. These numbers are provisional, as it is likely that they will increase when more records are submitted to SBRC.



Figures 5–6. Distribution by recording area of Cory's Shearwaters and Great Shearwaters in Scotland, 2022. These numbers are provisional, as it is likely that they will increase when more records are submitted to SBRC.

Plates 64 & 65. Cory's Shearwater, Kinghorn, Fife, 26 July 2022. © *Nigel Voaden*

At some sites multiple birds were recorded. Two Cory's Shearwater were seen from Nybster (Caithness) on 3 September, and three from Fife Ness during 15 August to 17 September. Additionally, one was seen close inshore off Chanonry Point (Ross & Cromarty) on 30 August (Plates 66–67). Five Great Shearwaters were seen from North Head, Wick (Caithness) on 4 September (Plates 69–70) with another on 18 September, and six from Lothbeg Point and Embo (both Sutherland) on 6 September. Fifteen were seen in the Minch (Outer Hebrides, Ross & Cromarty) on 6 September from a ferry (Plate 68), 17 were recorded past Beacon Head, North Ronaldsay on 18 September*, four from the Nukes, Sanday (Orkney) on 18 September and another five during 19–20 September, two from the Isle of May on 18 September, and five from Fife Ness (Fife) during 17 August to 29 September.

Plates 66 & 67. Cory's Shearwater, Chanonry Point, Ross & Cromarty, Highland, 30 August 2022. © *Steve Reddick*

The last recorded in Scotland during 2022 was a Cory's Shearwater seen from the Isle of May on 10–11 November.

There is a small possibility that some of the Cory's Shearwaters seen in Scotland during 2022 were instead the very closely related and similar Scopoli's Shearwater *C. diomedea*. The first Scottish record of Scopoli's Shearwater was on 9–11 August 2020 (Nadin 2020). This bird was identified as it flew close inshore allowing photographic images of the underwing, revealing critical identification features, particularly the extent of white in the primary feathers, that allowed it to be separated from Cory's Shearwater. Most Cory's Shearwaters observed in Scotland are not seen as well as this bird, and so the underwing detail will not have been recorded (although note plates 65–66 show the underwing detail of these two birds confirming them as Cory's). Therefore, SBRC decided to adopt a pragmatic approach and agreed to accept *Calonectris* records submitted as Cory's Shearwater as the default species, because birds seen in Scotland are most likely to be *C. borealis* (McInerny & McGowan 2022).

The reasons behind the unusually large numbers of Cory's and Great Shearwaters in Scotland during 2022 are unclear, as in other years when large numbers of birds are seen off south-west England and Ireland, these do not always reach Scottish waters. But it seems likely that a combination of a successful breeding season, weather patterns in the North Atlantic, and possibly favourable warmer oceanic temperatures all contributed to result in the movement of these birds into Scottish waters.

Plate 68. Great Shearwater, the Minch, Ross & Cromarty, Highland, from the Ullapool–Stornoway ferry, 6 September 2022, with Sooty Shearwaters and an immature Gannet. © *Andy Williams*

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all the observers who found, identified and submitted descriptions of many of the birds described in this paper to the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) through their local recorders. Their acceptance by SBRC will be announced on the SOC website www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/recent-decisions, and will be formally published in the 2022 SBRC Report in the June 2024 issue of *Scottish Birds*. However, the figures indicated here for both species should be considered provisional. A number of reports described in the text require assessment by SBRC, and are marked *; we urge the observers to submit descriptions to their local recorders and SBRC so that they can be assessed and, if accepted, formally added to the SBRC databases. Furthermore, we also ask that any other 2022 records be submitted to SBRC.

Particular thanks to Yvonne Benting (Outer Hebrides Recorder) for sharing the 2022 Outer Hebrides records, and to Russell Neave (Orkney Recorder) for the 2022 Orkney records. Thanks to all the photographers for permission to reproduce their images, to Ian Andrews for making the maps shown in Figures 5–6, and Mark Lewis (SBRC Chair) for comments on the text.

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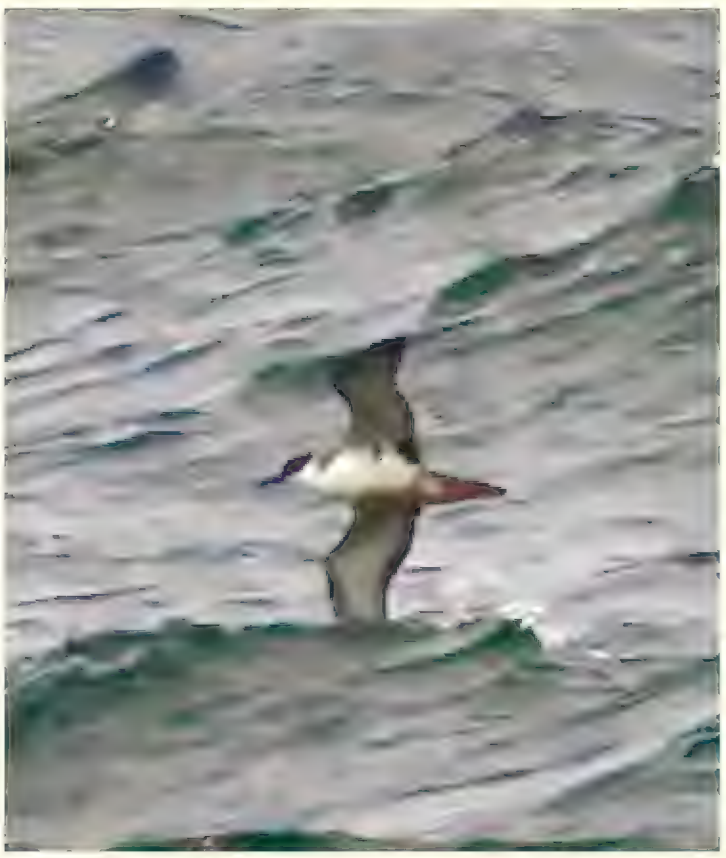

Plates 69 & 70. Two Great Shearwaters, North Head, Wick, Caithness, Highland, 4 September 2022.
© *Peter Stronach*

Plate 71. Pacific Swift, Sumburgh Head, Shetland, 19 June 2022. © *Andy Howard*

Pacific Swift at Sumburgh Head, 19 June 2022 – first Shetland record

A. HOWARD

As many of you will know coffee and cake are an important and intrinsic part of birding or wildlife photography, no less so than today on a windy and wet day in Shetland. Little could have prepared us for the events that followed our post-coffee and cake pitstop.

Sumburgh Head is a the southern most tip of Shetland and often throws up some interesting species. Being more of a photographer than a birder I was there with guests to photograph Puffins and hopefully spy an orca or two.

As the weather improved we decided to take advantage and headed outside, and my attention was instantly drawn to a 'swift' buzzing around the lighthouse complex. It was only when it passed to within twenty feet that I noticed the white band across its back. I grabbed a few record shots and instantly called Hugh Harrop; if Hugh didn't know what it was nobody would.

My initial description to him went something like this, "it's about twenty to twenty five percent larger than a regular swift but with a white band across its back and a distinct forked tail". I can't share with you exactly what was said in return except Hugh sounded rather excited by the description! I sent him a back-of-the-camera shot and back came the message "it's a mega Andy, a Pacific Swift!"

This beautiful bird then entertained us and the growing numbers of locals and visiting birders and photographers for the next few hours. It would head out to sea to return to feed on flies around the cills. On one fly-by it flew no more than fifteen feet above its growing number of admirers, what a stunning bird!

The afternoon didn't end there, a pod of orca also decided to get in on the action and made an all but too brief appearance. If Carlsberg made wildlife viewing days...

On a personal note I'm so pleased to have got the news out there as quickly as I did, I loved seeing the joy and excitement it brought to so many of the good people of Shetland, especially the lady who on seeing the bird burst into tears. As a professional wildlife photographer, guide and author sharing the beauty of nature with others is my job, this on the other hand was a completely new experience and one I will never forget.

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This record is subject to acceptance by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC).

Plate 72. Pacific Swift, Sumburgh Head, Shetland, 19 June 2022. © *Andy Howard*

Greater Sand Plover, Strathbeg Lagoon, 20 August 2022 – second North-East Scotland record

R. MACDONALD

Strathbeg Lagoon, North-East Scotland, lies about two kilometres south of the small fishing village of St Combs and three kilometres north-east of the RSPB Loch of Strathbeg Nature Reserve. It is one of the sites that I regularly check in spring and autumn as it attracts migrating wildfowl and waders. In autumn you can sometimes see birds flying in off the North Sea using the lagoon for feeding and resting before continuing their journey. It is particularly good on a falling tide. I've often been there when you think the site is bird-less only for flocks of waders to suddenly appear and start feeding. However, it's fair to say the site is hit and miss; on good days the whole lagoon is alive with waders but I've often been there when there are only a few birds present.

Plate 73. Greater Sand Plover, Strathbeg Lagoon, North-East Scotland, 20 August 2022. © *Dave Capon*

Plate 74. Greater Sand Plover, Strathbeg Lagoon, North-East Scotland, 20 August 2022. © *Dave Capon*

On the morning of 20 August my friend, Wil Ratcliffe, and I visited the Strathbeg Lagoon. When we first arrived there were just a few Dunlin and Sanderling. However, knowing that birds could appear on the falling tide, we sat ourselves down upwind of a long dead and decaying Minke Whale. It was not long before I saw this wader drop down about 50 yards away. It was continuously looking around which is not a bad idea as attacks by Peregrine and Sparrowhawks are common at the lagoon. I immediately knew it was something different. Plover-like and leggy, bigger than a Ringed Plover with a very obvious dark bandit like mask with white patch of feathers on either side of its face. In addition it had a pale orange upper breast with a narrow black line of feathers near the neck line below a strong stout bill. The lower chest and belly were pure white and the legs pale yellowish green. The remainder of the plumage comprised a buff brown back with slightly paler coverts. In addition you could see the much darker, almost black outer colouring to the primary and secondary feathers which was particularly noticeable in flight. The bird only stayed for a couple of minutes. We later saw it in the company of a small flock of Sanderlings. Again it was very flighty. The overall impression was of a larger and more leggy Ringed Plover with a bandit type mask. The attached photograph by David Capon shows the key features of the bird.

On returning home I immediately contacted Killian Mullarney sending him a very distant record shot. Killian verified it was indeed a male Greater Sand Plover, the 18th for the UK. We returned the next morning and saw it at the lagoon and again it was very wary and flighty. Much better views were had by the many birders who saw it close to St Combs. It is likely to be same bird that later was seen at Redcar, East Yorkshire, a short time after it was last seen at St Combs and at the Strathbeg Lagoon.

Ron Macdonald, Newburgh, Aberdeenshire.
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This record is subject to acceptance by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC).

Paddyfield Warbler at St Abb's Head, 31 August 2022 - the second record for Borders

P. SAFFORD

Mid-afternoon on 31 August, I walked to the Mire Loch more for exercise and the scenery than to find rarities, given the relatively unfavourable weather conditions - sunny with north-easterlies. However, the arrival of a couple of rare *Acrocephalus* warblers on Blakeney Point, Norfolk the previous day (a Blyth's Reed Warbler and a Paddyfield Warbler) meant I hadn't completely written off a surprise, and thus arrived hoping to catch up with any migrants that had arrived through the day.

Arriving at the southern end of the Mire Loch at around 16:00 hrs, I walked along the eastern shore, which has sparser cover than the western shore and is thus easier to work. The first section of cover is a line of bullrushes and a single bush; two Stonechats occupied the bush. While watching these I noticed a third bird hopping around the bottom of the bush - not a Stonechat - and flicking into the bullrushes. I got binoculars on it and realised it was an *Acrocephalus* warbler...

Excitement levels immediately picked up. The local Reed Warblers had already left, and being at an isolated section of cover this bird had to be fresh in. The Blakeney Point '*Acros*' again sprung to mind and I raised my binoculars, preparing for a battle with a potential Blyth's Reed or Marsh Warbler. However, I was instead taken aback by a bold supercilium, a short bill and a bird that just looked odd. I was reminded of photos of Paddyfield Warbler I'd seen on social media, but I had never even considered finding one of these and never been anywhere near one, and hadn't done my homework on the more detailed features of this species... uh oh...

Since the bird's cover was limited and it could have flown into the dense cover on the opposite shore at any moment, I went straight for my camera and fired off some shots while the bird was showing, and sent images of my camera screen to a Whatsapp group of my university birding mates, and also to Ciaran Hatsell, the St Abb's Head reserve ranger. Given it was an *Acro* that did not look at all like a Reed and therefore surely not a Blyth's Reed or Marsh Warbler, a process of elimination left me thinking this had to be a Paddyfield, but I needed to know the more detailed features... Ciaran agreed with my ID, highlighting the short primary projection and dark feathers above the supercilium as

Plate 75. Paddyfield Warbler, Mire Loch, Borders, 31 August 2022. © *Patrick Safford*

strong pro-Paddyfield features, and my university mates agreed too. Booted was eliminated by the overall colour and the all-pale feet and toes, and the news was put out.

Inevitably the bird soon flew across the loch into the dense cover of the inland shore. I stayed at the head attempting to re-find it until dusk, and just before dusk Andrew Kinghorn picked it up again by its call. A 'tack' with a hint of a 'chack', which reminded me of a Ring Ouzel - more of a 'ch' sound than the similar call of a Sedge Warbler. We enjoyed further views; now the light was flat, the tea-like colour of the bird was striking - clearly different to Reed Warbler - and now that I knew which features to look for the bird became a lot more distinctive! After a few good views the bird stopped calling and roosted in the bullrushes by the boathouse. Unfortunately, there was no sign of the bird the following day after a clear night.

Patrick Safford, Cambridge.
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Paddyfield Warbler status in Scotland

Paddyfield Warbler is a rare visitor to Scotland, with the majority being recorded in autumn on the northern isles, especially Shetland. In fact, the first for the Scottish mainland was not recorded until 13–29 October 2005, a well-watched individual at Torness, Lothian. This is the second record for Borders, the first being a bird trapped and ringed at St Abb's Head on 5 June 2016.

This record is subject to acceptance by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC).

Melodious Warbler, Cruden Bay, 5–9 September 2022 - third North-East Scotland record

P. BLOOR

Early September 2022 had produced some of the best conditions for an autumn fall that we'd had for many years and the previous few days had produced a good selection of scarce and rare migrants along the Aberdeenshire coast. I'd skipped work early to check on my patch up at Longhaven which, after a couple of hours searching had produced absolutely nothing. I then dithered on where to go next, up north to check a couple of sites or to the nearby Cruden Bay woods; a site I hadn't visited for a long while. It was around this time that news came through of a Melodious Warbler at the Donmouth, Aberdeen and I settled on going to Cruden Bay.

Enjoying the calm evening, I wandered down the gully with a bit of optimism and wondering, as I usually do when visiting this wood, how many birds must slip through here unnoticed.

A bird flicked off to the right down into the thick vegetated gully, 'a large looking phyllosc' I thought to myself. Although remaining largely hidden it would occasionally make an appearance, when it would show quite well whilst feeding on insects around the Umbellifers in the strong evening sunlight. It was, at this point, that my ability to identify warblers headed off in the wrong direction and down the proverbial rabbit hole. Ignoring all the obvious features, I convinced myself that what I was watching was an 'unstreaked Acro' and persevered with this train of thought for a good few minutes, whilst getting increasingly frustrated as to why this bird didn't actually look like what I thought it was. Annoyed with myself for not knowing, I took a moment for a mental reboot and there it was... a Melodious!

Plate 76. Melodious Warbler, Cruden Bay, North-East Scotland, 7 September 2022. © *Phil Crockett*

Description

Size and structure: A medium-sized warbler, giving an initial impression of a chunky looking Willow Warbler, although with an elongated look. Undertail coverts longer than on *Phylloscopus* warbler, extending down to about a third of the tail length. Head shape quite rounded with no obvious peak to the crown and a relatively thick bill. A short primary projection with up to six relatively evenly spaced primary tips extending beyond the tertials, with no obvious increase in the spacings between the longest primaries. Thickset dark legs. **Upperparts, wings and tail:** Upperpart were predominantly a uniform pale brown with no obvious green or yellowish tinge except towards the crown and forehead where there was a slight yellowish wash. A weak supercilium tinged yellow along with pale lores and ear coverts. The first sighting of the bird on the deck was of hidden behind some vegetation with just its head showing and the plain expression to the face was very striking. Paler but narrow fringes to tertials but lacking any obvious pale fringing to the secondaries and therefore no obvious pale wing panel. **Underparts:** A uniform off-white to the undertail covert, belly and flanks. A yellowish wash to the breast increasing marginally in strength on the throat. The yellowish tinge could be burnt out in the strong evening sunlight giving an impression of the whole underparts being uniform off-white whilst at other times the yellowish wash was really very obvious. **Bare parts:** The robust looking bill completely dark upper mandible and pale yellow lower mandible. Similarly relatively thick dark, horn coloured, legs. **Call:** the bird was not heard calling.

The bird remained in the gully before disappearing and no other birders managed to catch up with it that evening. Although not seen the following day it was re-found by Roddy Mavor and Ian Gordon in the same area on the afternoon of 7 September where it remained until the evening of 9 September. A much appreciated bird by North-East Scotland birders as, aside from the brief bird at Donmouth, Aberdeen, on 5 September, the only previous North-East Scotland record was of a bird seen by only a handful of observers at Girdle Ness on 1 October 1993, some 29 years previously!

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Email: philip.bloor@pelagica.co.uk

This record is subject to acceptance by the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC).

Brown Shrike, Bullers of Buchan, 8 September 2022 – second North-East Scotland record

P. HACKETT

Having spent the previous evening up at Rattray Head looking for the array of migrants that had been grounded on the coast of North-East Scotland over the last few days, news came of a first-winter Red-backed Shrike nearby at Bullers of Buchan, so straight from work I ventured up to look for it.

On arrival, very few birders were present, and I walked round the field adjacent to the old railway embankment. I was told that there had been two Red-backed Shrikes seen in the morning, in close proximity to each other and that photographs had been taken - I hadn't seen any news or photos of the second bird on social media. I continued looking and walking back to cover both areas where the other bird had been seen. After a few trips back and forth I noticed a small bird on a fence of the single house adjacent to the road.

Plate 77. Brown Shrike, Bullers of Buchan, North-East Scotland, 8 September 2022. © *Paul Hackett*

I set my scope up and couldn't believe what I was looking at... it clearly was not a first-winter Red-backed Shrike... I was looking at an adult Brown Shrike! As the enormity of my find began to sink in I started shaking - this was only the second record for North-East Scotland and 22nd record for the UK - I studied the bird for a while, before attaching my camera to my scope to get some digi-scoped photographs.

After a while, as the bird looked quite settled, I moved a bit closer ensuring I didn't disturb it then continued taking pictures. The bird was still on the fence for a few minutes before it dropped down into the field and disappeared. Fortunately, I was with a photographer who had also managed to get some shots. I downloaded some pictures to my iPhone and sent one to my good friend Paul Baxter saying "is this what I think it is? BS". His reply was swift... "I'd say so, where is it?". I told him and he then replied "Great find mate - welcome to North-East Scotland, how many people must have looked at that bird, you need to get the news out".

I posted a pic to ABZ Rare Birds WhatsApp group just before 18:15 hrs. People started to arrive but the bird didn't show again that evening. Fortunately, it did show next day and was watched till around 15:30 hrs which was the last sighting of the bird. During this time it was identified as an adult female. I did go back that day but didn't arrive till after 17:00 hrs so didn't see it again, but I was glad to hear that others had connected with it earlier in the day.

Paul Hackett, Ellon, Aberdeenshire.
Email: paulhdigicam@aol.com

This record is subject to acceptance by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC).

Plate 78 a–b. Black Kite, Outhead, Fife, 12 September 2022. © *Fraser Todd*

Black Kite at Outhead, 12 September 2022 – the first record for Fife

F. TODD

Since I moved to Fife last year, the Eden Estuary has become my local patch and I have tried to get out and give it as much coverage as possible this year. On Sunday 11 September, whilst in St Andrews, I noticed West Sands beach was unusually almost completely covered in seaweed after recent strong easterly winds. Thinking it looked good for passage waders, I decided I would visit the next morning at low tide to walk the length of the beach up to Outhead, hoping I might get Little Stint for the year list.

Arriving at 09:30 hrs, I headed out on the sand to walk north nearer the shoreline, albeit in the wake of several dog walkers. Despite this the beach was absolutely heaving with birds, with thousands of gulls picking through the seaweed and 2,500+ Oystercatchers lining the whole length of the shore. After around an hour of scanning, however, whilst slowly making my way up the beach, I had had little luck with small waders and was thinking of going home due to my frustration with disturbance. Luckily I decided I may as well get to the mouth of the River Eden before calling it a day.

At 10:37 hrs I looked up from my scope to see a dark brown bird approaching me very low over the beach, surrounded by mobbing gulls. Looking through my bins I got a brief view of an apparently all dark-brown raptor, before it suddenly chose to land less than 100 m away from me. On account of the colouration and flight style I had discounted Buzzard immediately, and was delighted in assuming I had a good patch record of a female or juvenile Marsh Harrier. I quickly got out my phone to capture this unique experience of seeing a harrier perched on the beach, and swung my scope onto the bird.

It was at this moment that I suddenly realised the plumage was all wrong for Marsh Harrier; with no pale-yellow head markings, instead an obvious dark 'bandit' mask on a paler brown background. "Wait that's no Marsh Harrier" I think I exclaimed. I could also see pale markings on the upperwings forming a crescent-shaped panel, a long tail and short and sturdy yellow legs. Thinking, but not wanting to believe it (as it would be a lifer for me), this was surely a Black Kite!

I somehow managed to grab two photos just as the bird took off after maybe 15 seconds on the ground. I threw my phone into my pocket and followed the bird with my scope as it gained height circling very close to me. Now I could see the tail was almost perfectly triangular with no sign of a fork, with long wings - slightly angled at the carpals - and long primary fingers. The underwing pattern was similar to that of Red Kite, with black wingtips and a pale primary window, however, the overall colour was a

fairly uniform dark-brown including the body and tail, with no trace of rufous anywhere.

Adrenaline kicking in, I tracked the bird as it flew down low again over the beach, heading away from me towards the river channel. In flight the long arched wings of a kite were obvious as well as the angled carpals and now a slight fork in the tail. The pale upperwing crescent especially stood out, appearing almost golden in the sunlight. As it flew over the river and then west over the far shore I took a few more pictures through my scope to try and capture some of the detail in flight, several of which turned out acceptable.

Still in shock but now fully sure of the identification I quickly put out a message on the Fife WhatsApp group along with the first two pictures I had taken, hoping that someone might be nearby to track it. Looking back I could see the bird had started circling low over Reres Wood on the north side of the estuary, being mobbed by Carrion Crows. I was hopeful it might hang around here but after a minute or two it started gaining height before heading off purposefully west over Leuchars base towards either Guardbridge or Leuchars. Due to my position out on the beach, the sand dunes soon blocked my view to the west, and by the time I had run back over the beach I couldn't manage to refind it. I spent a few hours in the afternoon looking for the bird over the hills west of Guardbridge but with no further sign, and sadly there was no subsequent sightings.

That evening as I put my photos on Twitter, I still couldn't quite believe the incredible encounter with a bird I never thought I would see in Scotland had actually happened, and a long-standing dream of mine to find a Scottish county first had likely just come true. Although I wished it had stuck around for longer so more people could have seen it!

Although I didn't see specifically the direction it had first appeared from, the fact it landed on the beach by the sea before heading inland, makes me think it had likely just arrived in-off; and I assumed it to be a young bird on account of the obvious dark mask and dark bill.

Fraser Todd, Guardbridge, Fife.
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This record has been accepted by the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC).

Black Kite status in Scotland

Since the first record in Aberdeenshire on 18 April 1901, there has been a total of 56 Black Kites recorded in Scotland to the end of 2020. The vast majority of records have been in the spring (88%) compared to just seven individuals (12%) in autumn (Figure 1). However, it has shown a very strong increase in the last decade, with 32 birds (57% of the total) occurring since 2010 (Figure 2). We can probably expect it to be increasingly regular - welcome news to Scottish recording areas awaiting their first record.

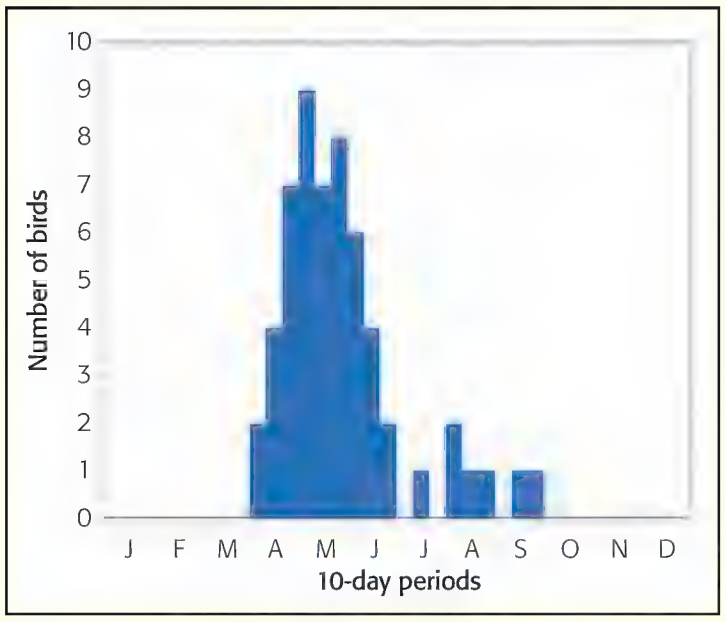


Figure 1. Seasonal distribution of Black Kite records in Scotland to the end of 2020 (SBRC data).

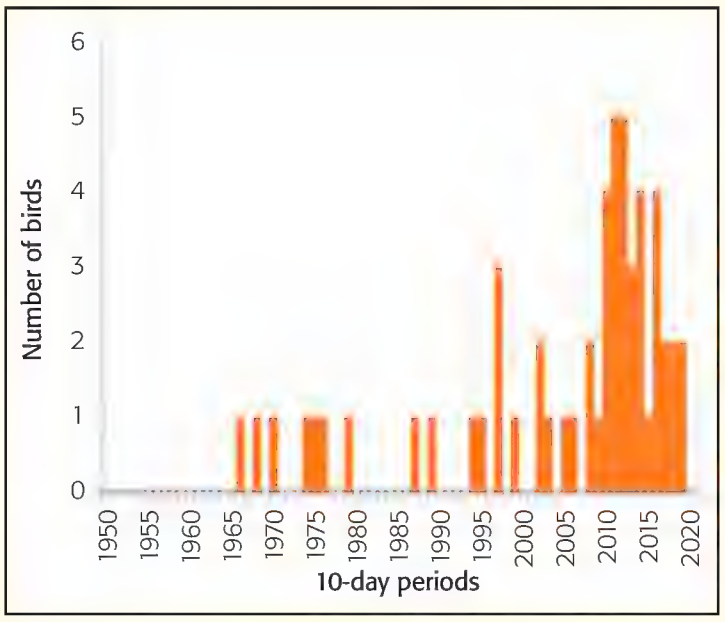


Figure 2. Annual totals of Black Kite records in Scotland to the end of 2020 (SBRC data).

A 'southern' Yellow Wagtail at Quendale and Brake, Shetland, 1 October 2022

A.H.J. HARROP & P.V. HARVEY

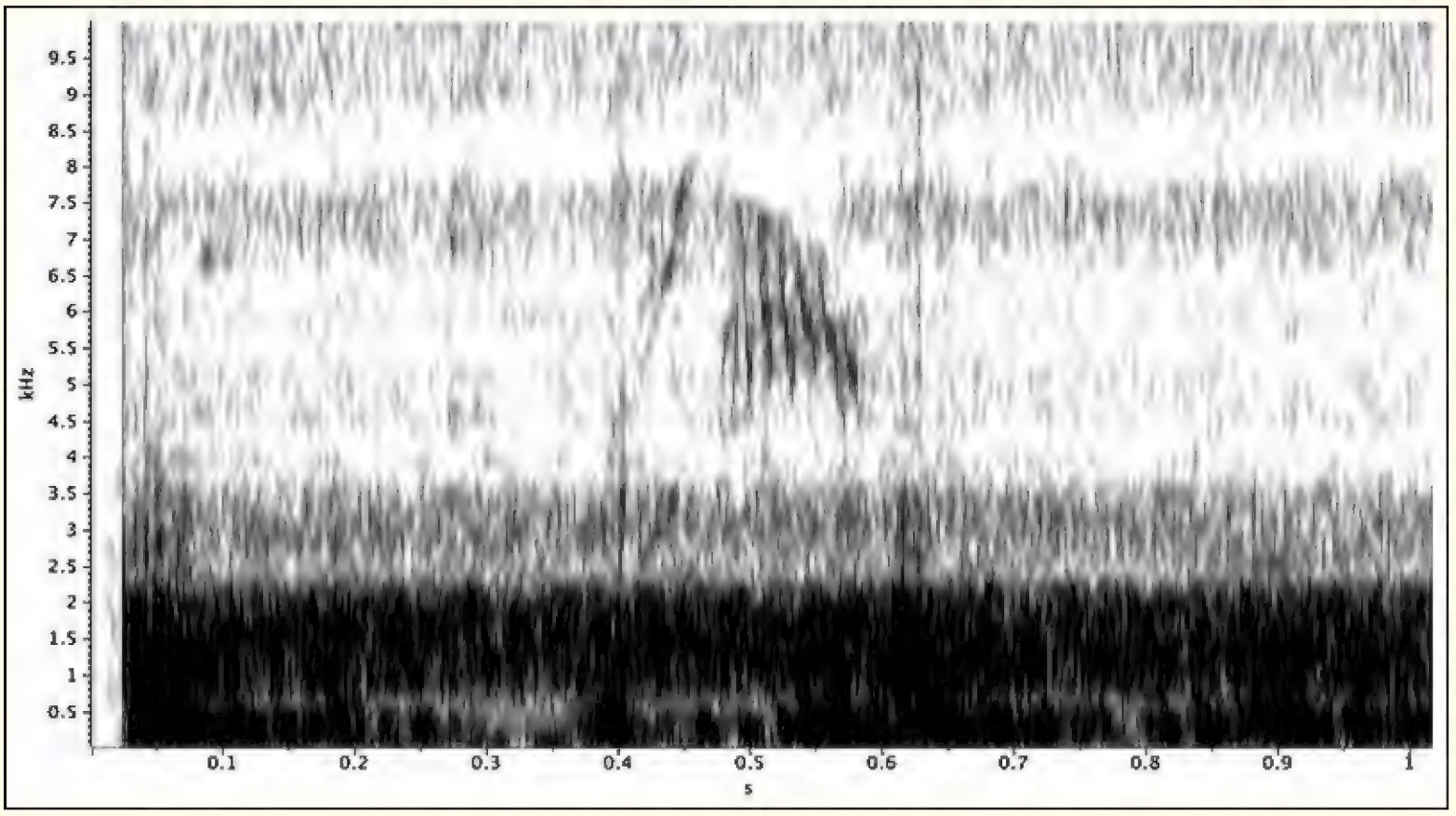
Discovery

At 08:20 hrs on 1 October 2022, Paul Harvey (PVH) observed a wagtail with a 'buzzy' call flying over Quendale. It was heard on another two occasions but only seen distantly in flight before being lost heading north towards Brake. What was presumably the same bird had been noted flying over Bakkasetter at 07:20 hrs by Rob Fray. At about 10:20 hrs the same morning Andrew Harrop (AHJH) located a puzzling Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* at Brake which had pale yellow underparts combined with a 'buzzy' call. He also obtained some poor recordings using his mobile phone in windy conditions. That afternoon PVH located the bird in a crop at Brake, and obtained a better phone recording. Further attempts by him and AHJH to obtain more recordings were unsuccessful; the bird was elusive and last heard north of Brake at about 16:15 hrs.

Description

The initial encounter by PVH comprised only flight views. AHJH saw the bird quite well (if briefly) on the ground and was surprised by its appearance: 'buzzy' wagtails in Shetland in early October invite thoughts of Eastern Yellow *Motacilla tschutschensis*, yet this looked like a Western. The supercilium was poorly marked, its upperparts were brownish grey, the wingbars weren't striking, and the underparts pale yellow, brighter yellow on the undertail-coverts. In short, it appeared quite similar to *thunbergi*. When PVH saw it again in the afternoon, he also noted a poorly marked face pattern, distinctly brown-toned upperparts, and creamy underparts with contrasting bright yellow undertail coverts.

Figure 1. Sonogram of PVH's recording of call of 'southern' Yellow Wagtail, Brake, 1 October 2022. (sonogram by Magnus Robb).



Diagnosis

The recordings made by AHJH in the morning looked interesting but were of poor quality which prevented confident conclusions. His analysis of the recording made by PVH in the afternoon suggested that it was of an *iberiae/feldegg* type, but it was felt desirable to seek input from someone with more expertise. PVH sent the recording and sonogram to Magnus Robb, with the suggestion that it might have a southern European origin.

Magnus replied as follows: "I'd say your wagtail is definitely one of the southern taxa: *cinereocapilla*, *feldegg* or *iberiae*. As you said yourself it's very buzzy, with deep and rather coarse modulations (i.e., not very tightly packed together compared to say Eastern Yellow Wagtail), and the pitch is fairly low. Also, the initial part of the call is less incisive than in other yellow wagtails. More specifically, it takes a longer time to get from the start of the call to the maximum frequency and intensity than in other yellow wagtail taxa: the sloping line in the sonagram is not very steep. I personally don't know how to distinguish between the various southern taxa on call."

Magnus noted that one school of thought believes that there are differences between the taxa, but felt that their methodology needs testing. There is also the issue of intergrades, as noted by e.g. Dubois (2020) who found that even some *flava* × *iberiae* intergrades have calls similar to *iberiae*.

The '*plexa*' problem

Any discussion of autumn wagtails with 'buzzy' calls must take account of so-called *'plexa'*, which given its range seems a likely vagrant. Alstrom & Mild (2003) noted that populations of *thunbergi* from the northern parts of eastern Siberia - from the Khatanga river east to the Kolyma river - were usually separated as *'plexa'*, but considered them indistinguishable from *thunbergi*. As noted by Collinson *et al.* (2013), however, they have eastern-clade mtDNA. A more recent discussion, by Hellquist (2021), suggested that *'plexa'* might be better treated as an intergrade between *thunbergi* and *tschutschensis* rather than a separate taxon; if so, this might have implications for the treatment of Western and Eastern Yellow Wagtails as separate species.

With respect to calls, on current knowledge those of *'plexa'* appear similar to those of other Eastern Yellow Wagtails (e.g. Bot *et al.* 2014), so differ from those of southern taxa and the Brake bird.

Yellow Wagtails in Shetland and the importance of sound recordings

Pennington *et al.* (2004), in their account of Yellow Wagtail, included records of *flava*, *thunbergi*, *flavissima* and *feldegg*, but also noted the regular appearance in late autumn of grey and white yellow wagtails with buzzy calls suspected of being of eastern origin. Since then, there have also been six accepted records of Eastern Yellow Wagtail from Shetland.

In terms of sound recordings, Xeno-canto holds relatively few examples from Shetland. The examples below (amongst a few others) are a beginning, but it would be useful to have many more:

flava: https://xeno-canto.org/726142
thunbergi: https://xeno-canto.org/747582
tschutschensis: https://xeno-canto.org/677403

Useful introductions to Yellow Wagtail calls can be found in e.g. Wroza (2020). It is essential to obtain recordings of vagrant taxa to support their identification, and as in this case even recordings made using a mobile phone can be of critical importance. This record shows that 'southern' taxa do occur in autumn and (along with Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*) need to be taken into account when 'buzzy' wagtails are heard.

For those using mobile phones to make recordings, advice can be found at (for example):

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/how-to-record-bird-sounds-with-your-smartphone-our-tips/

https://support.ebird.org/en/support/solutions/articles/48001064305-smartphone-recording-tips

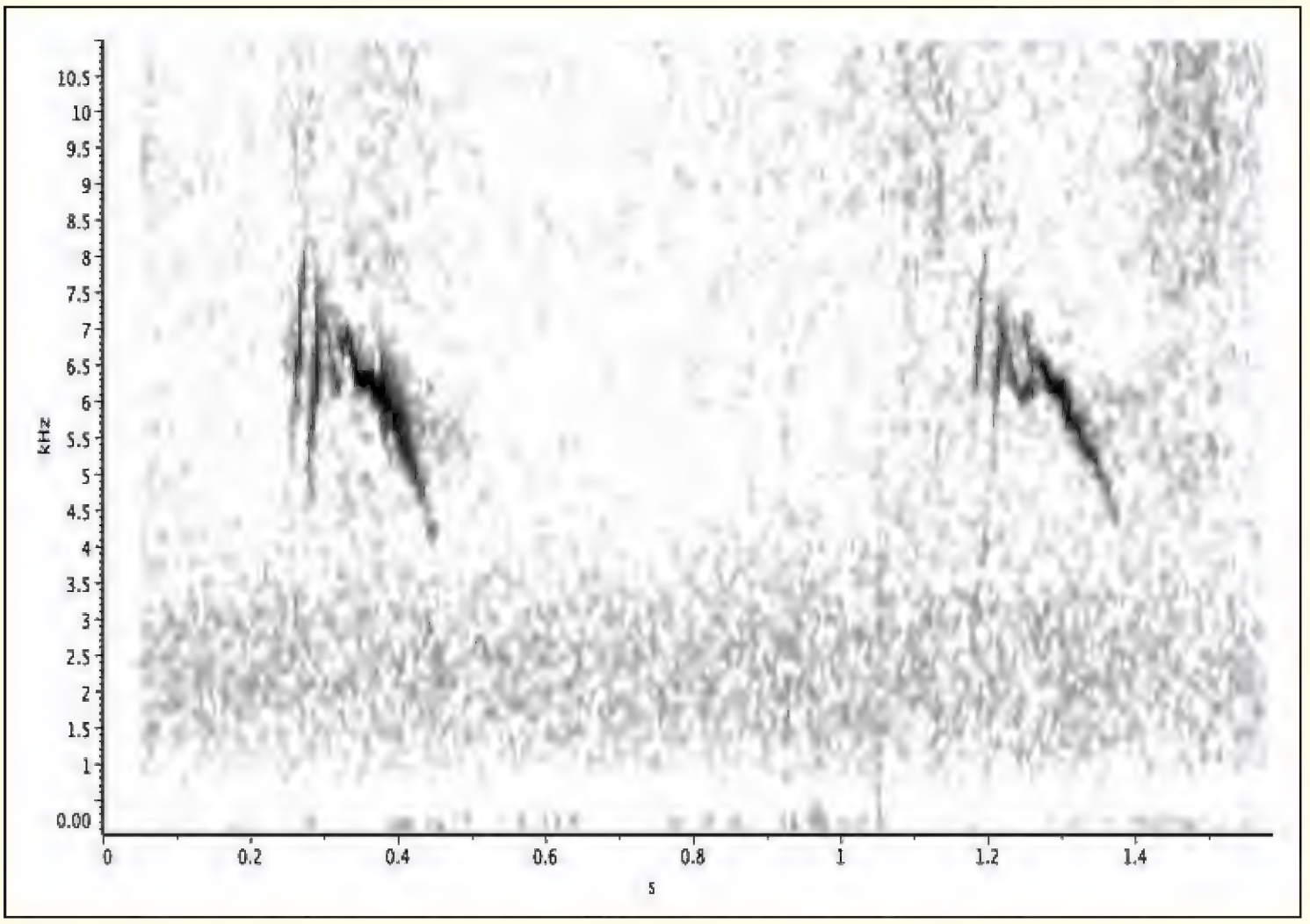


Figure 2. Sonogram of AHJH's recording of calls of *thunbergi*, Out Skerries, 9 September 2022. (sonogram by Mark Lewis).

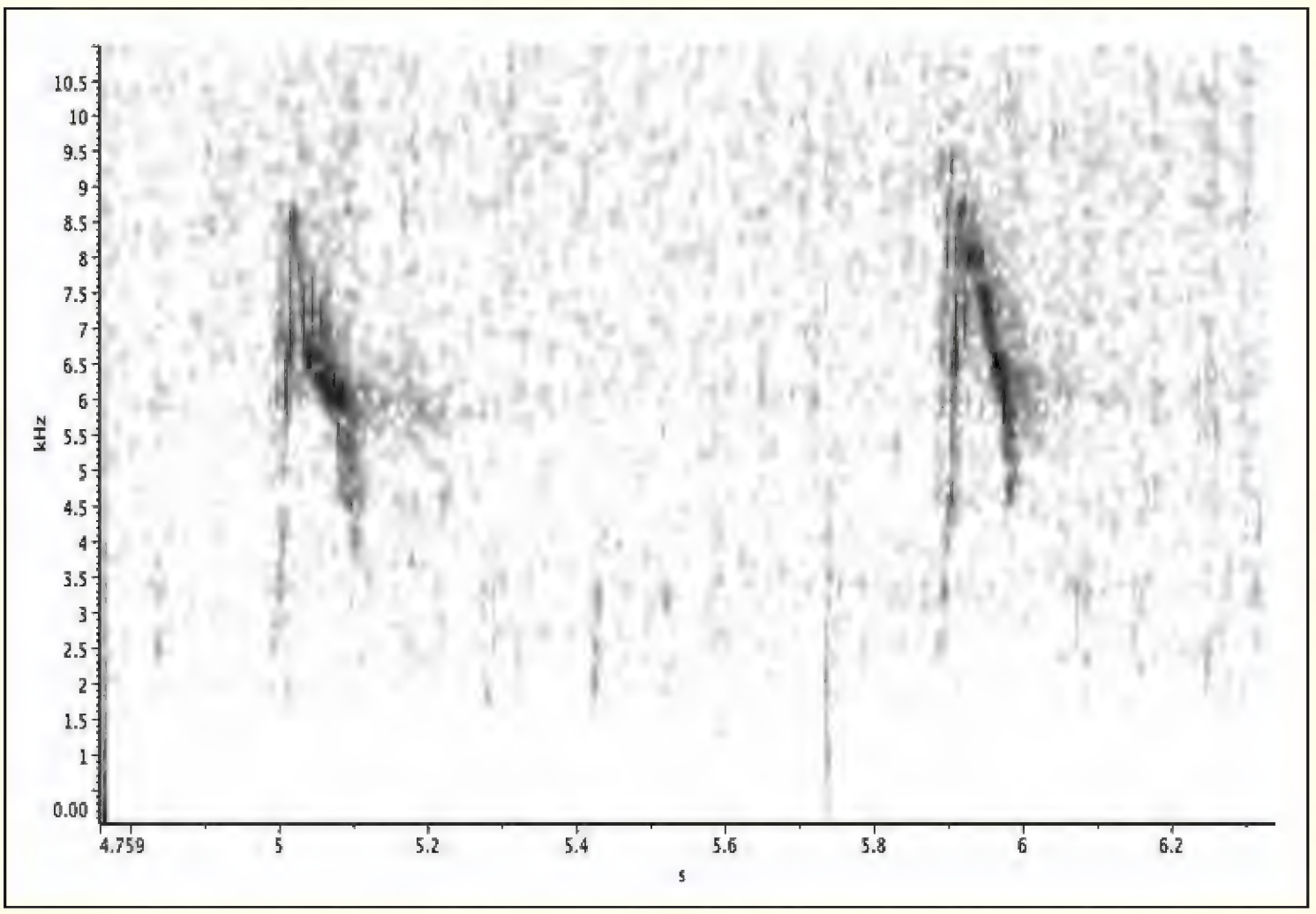


Figure 3. Sonogram of AHJH's recording of calls of *tschutschensis*, Noss (Spiggie), 29 September 2021. (sonogram by Mark Lewis).

These also include tips on better and inexpensive alternatives to the installed software.

Appendix

Yellow Wagtail taxonomy and Scottish records of rare taxa

The Yellow Wagtail complex can be treated as a single species, two species (Western and Eastern, the current norm), or multiple species if taxa traditionally treated as subspecies are recognised as species. In terms of vocalisations, call types can be grouped geographically: north-western taxa (including *flavissima, flava, beema, thunbergi*); south-western taxa (*cinereocapilla, iberiae, feldegg*); and eastern taxa (including *'plexa', tschutschensis, taivana, macronyx*). A quite detailed introduction to their calls can be found in Bot *et al.* (2014).

South-western taxa are very rare in Scotland. Forester & Andrews (2007) listed just two records of a southern subspecies, both *feldegg*: one on Fair Isle during 7–9 May 1970 and the other in Lothian on 28 April 1984. The only accepted record since is of a *cinereocapilla* × *iberiae* on the Outer Hebrides during 1–28 June 2007.

Eastern taxa are rare in Scotland, though a significant proportion of unproven records may have involved eastern taxa as suspected. There had been eight accepted Scottish records up until the end of 2021, including six from Shetland: one on Fair Isle in 1909, then one in 2009 (Yell), one in 2011 (Out Skerries), two in 2018 (Unst & Sumburgh) and one in 2021 (Noss, Spiggie). Additional Scottish records came from Outer Hebrides in 2016 and Highland in 2020. All of these arrived between 29 September and 8 November.

As noted above, Citrine Wagtail which is closely related to Yellow Wagtail also has 'buzzy' calls. It is a regular scarce migrant in Scotland: there had been 223 accepted records up until the end of 2020 (McInerny & McGowan, *Scottish Bird Report* 2020).

Acknowledgements

Magnus Robb confirmed our initial suspicions and provided an improved sonogram with commentary. Mark Lewis tidied up our sonograms and encouraged us to include the Appendix. Rob Fray and Roger Riddington commented on an early draft.

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This record is subject to acceptance by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC).

Least Bittern at Scousburgh, Shetland, 7 October 2022 – first British record

B. MITCHELL & S.D. KEIGHTLEY

On 7 October we had just left the second Myrtle Warbler between Bigton and Ireland and decided to drive past Geosetter on the way to Scousburgh Sands, to look for two summer-plumaged Great Northern Divers which had been reported there. We drove up to the small car park situated in the sand dunes at Scousburgh. As I was driving, I was making sure I did not park in one of the puddles when Steve suddenly shouted "stop the car turn the engine off". I looked up and in front of the car was what appeared to be a bundle of feathers in the open on the sand at the edge of the car park. The 'bundle of feathers' proved to be a bird which had adopted an aggressive crouching posture. Steve grabbed his camera and was taking photographs through the windscreen. I then backed the car up and turned it slightly so that photographs could be taken through the open window. The bird was obviously a small member of the Heron family, but because of its posture it was difficult to make out what the plumage actually was.

Plate 79. Least Bittern, Scousburgh, Shetland, 7 October 2022. © *Mark Wilkinson*

I had a copy of *Collins Bird Guide* in the car and quickly ruled out Little Bittern due to the rich browns and almost rufous/brown wing panel. It was at this point that Least Bittern was mentioned. Steve had an App on his phone for Sibley's North American Bird Guide and he started checking that, but the bird was still in the same unhelpful position. At this point some other people were coming up the access road and I left the car to make sure that the bird was not flushed. I stopped a car and explained the position. The driver was a birdwatcher so he walked up to the car park to view the bird. Two other people arrived (Charlie Birtles and Paul Baker) and asked if it was still there? Apparently the bird had originally been seen by Charlie (Charlotte) Birtles and she had taken some photographs with her mobile phone. She had sent the photographs to her boyfriend, and then left to pick him up at the Myrtle Warbler site - see here for further details https://www.birdguides.com/articles/britain-ireland/rarity-finders-least-bittern-in-shetland/

At this point Charlie and Paul Baker said they had not identified the bird and went to stand on the sand dune behind the car. From the Sibley App it appeared that the bird was more likely to be Least Bittern and we were aware that the news needed to be broadcast, but were aware of the reaction it would cause. At that point Steve put out the news on Shetland Rare Bird WhatsApp Group reporting a possible Least Bittern at Scousburgh Sands. We had arrived at the site at 15:45 hrs and the first message was timed at 15:52 hrs.

Plate 80. Least Bittern, Scousburgh, Shetland, 7 October 2022. © *Steve D. Keightley*

The bird then became more active and it became obvious that it was a Least Bittern. It was decided that we should alter the WhatsApp message from a possible to a definite. Paul then came over to the car and said that he thought the bird was a Least Bittern. We agreed and the news was put out on the WhatsApp at 15:58 hrs as a definite Least Bittern. People were already coming up the track, but the bird then turned and walked into the grass and disappeared from view. From that point onwards only poor views were obtained. Soon some members of Shetland Bird Club arrived and they took control of the situation. At one point the bird was looked at through a thermal imaging monocular but no heat could be detected. It was apparent during our observations that the bird was in a distressed state and it appeared that it was unlikely to find food in such unsuitable habitat. Due to the deteriorating weather conditions, the bird was taken into care but sadly died overnight.

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This record is subject to acceptance by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) and, as the first for Britain, by the British Ornithologists Union (BOU).

Least Bittern in the Western Palearctic

The Least Bittern is a small heron, the smallest member of the family Ardeidae found in the Americas. Least Bitterns breed in marshy areas from southern Canada to northern Argentina. The northern populations are highly migratory and winter in California, Texas and Florida, and as far south as Panama and Colombia.

Ten of the 13 past regional occurrences have come from the Azores, most recently at Black Beach, Corvo on 10 October 2022, coincidentally just three days after the Shetland occurrence. The only other records are from Iceland, on Heimaey in September 1970, at Farranfore, Co Kerry on 7 October 2019 (see - https://www.birdguides.com/articles/least-bittern-a-new-species-for-ireland*), and the Shetland bird described here. None of those seen has yet been a) alive and well enough and b) lingered long enough to be seen by large numbers of birders. Several of the birds, like the Shetland bird, have died shortly after arrival.*

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PhotoSPOT

Plate 81. Photographing any bird is never easy but Kingfishers bring their own set of difficulties. For a start they're quite elusive, small, fly very fast low over water and although not shy of people they often hunt well out of the way. So having found their winter hunting grounds and taken a few 'keeper' portrait shots the next challenges are action shots, diving and flying to be specific. For this you need light... lots of light, a high shutter speed and preferably a low ISO setting on your camera, a long lens with a wide aperture and a high frame rate. My location was in a public hide, which thankfully has the sun at its back, so the birds were front lit and the colourful background on the water was the reflection from a reed bed, which with winter sun offers a rich warm glow.

Okay, now all I needed was a calm day for mirror smooth reflections. So far all my wish list was in place. But how do you get a Kingfisher to fly past you... you don't.

Having observed the bird's diving, I noticed a behaviour pattern - if a Kingfisher has a successful dive it never returns to its high hunting perch. It has a tendency to fly, with its catch, in the direction of the dive, keeping low over the water with the intention of landing on a low branch to consume the unlucky Stickleback ...this makes for fly-by opportunities.

Now I'm set, the Kingfisher makes a dive, I get autofocus lock on the surfacing bird and track it taking off, firing the camera at 20 frames per second I get 29 fames, so the whole process takes just under 1.5 seconds start to finish.

Successful photographs of Kingfishers requires a good camera kit, experience and if you don't have a bit of luck you'll get nothing more than blank framed blurry pictures - I was lucky that day but then again you make your own luck.

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Equipment used
Nikon Z9 camera, Nikkor 400mm f4.5 lens with Nikon Z1.4x teleconverter, Manual, 1/1,000 second, ISO 2,000, f6.3.

Featuring the best images posted on the SOC website each quarter, PhotoSpot will present stunning portraits as well as record shots of something interesting, accompanied by the story behind the photograph and the equipment used. Upload your photos now - it's open to all.